

THE SIEGE

By the same author

JUNGLE GREEN

6th Impression

**“A convincing picture of character triumphant
over circumstances.” Sir Harold Nicholson in**

The Observer

THE SIEGE

A Story from Kohima

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M.C.

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**THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO FIVE
HUNDRED BRITISH SOLDIERS**

PREFACE

OF the three great sieges involving the British Army in the last world war that of Tobruk is best known to the public, but as an example of sheer heroism and of victory against overwhelming odds, both human and material, the siege of Kohima takes pride of place. Of the overall battle, which continued long after the siege was raised, Lord Mountbatten has said, "The Battle of Kohima will probably go down as one of the greatest battles in history. It was in effect the Battle of Burma." The battle would never have been fought but for the marvellous courage of five hundred soldiers of the British Territorial Army.

In March, 1914, the Japanese armies in Burma set forth to invade India. They crossed the great river Chindwin and marched through the trackless wastes of jungle-clad mountains between that river and the Ledo railway two hundred and fifty miles away. The only all-weather road over the mountains ran through Imphal and Kohima to Dimapur, where it joined the Ledo railway. These three small towns were held by British and Indian soldiers. The Japanese, basing their operations on this road, and first cutting off the garrison in Imphal, directed their famous 31st Division at Kohima and Dimapur.

By the 5th April the Japanese had surrounded Kohima on three sides and were fast moving in on the garrison of some two thousand Indians, most of them administrative troops classified 'non-combatant'. On this day a long convoy of three-ton lorries wound its way up the twisting road towards the town, perched five thousand feet high on a mountain top. In the lorries were five hundred citizen soldiers of the 4th Battalion of the Royal West Kent Regiment, a Territorial Army unit, led by one of the few professional soldiers among them, one John Laverty, a 'bloody-minded' Irishman of immense courage, of great strength of character and possessed of inflexible stubbornness.

They drove in by the only route remaining; they left their lorries under heavy shell-fire, and a few hours later the Japanese closed the ring round the town. For the following sixteen days they held off, with little help from within or without, a division

numbering twelve to fifteen thousand well-trained, skilful and fanatically brave Japanese soldiers.

This book sets down the story of those sixteen days, as I imagine they were lived and seen by the Battalion Intelligence Officer. In compiling the story I have met with two major difficulties: the lack of detailed official records of the engagement and the diffidence and short memories of those who took part and still live.

The only official record is a short War Diary, made up under the stress of battle by a busy officer and giving in outline only the conditions existing in Kohima at the time, and the way in which the siege was conducted.

Diffidence and short memory are common attributes of soldiers who have taken part in great battles. They recall, in after years, only a general impression of the engagement, while any sense of achievement or any awareness that they have taken part in heroic action, if it ever existed, has long since been dimmed by later experience either on or off the battlefield.

In writing this story, therefore, I have had to draw on my own knowledge of battle conditions in Assam and Burma which I gained while serving with the Second British Division, the formation largely responsible for raising the siege of Kohima. The result is that, though the story is true and the incidents I describe actually took place, they may not have occurred exactly as I describe them. In a few cases, in order to ensure continuity in the story and to overcome gaps in the records, I have attributed certain incidents to men who may not have been directly concerned in them. I do not believe that these departures from pure fact detract one jot from the story nor from the high standing of those who took part.

I have used real names throughout, except in cases where it would give pain to do so, or where certain incidents cannot be attributed to specific members of the unit. For convenience I have listed at the end of the book those whose real names I have used.

I would stress that the heroes of this story were members of a Territorial Army unit, because, of late, there has been too much loose criticism of our citizen army: "It is dead or moribund; it is inefficient, ill trained; its members lack spirit, patriotism and devotion to duty." I heard similar criticism in 1939. I hope this book will provide an answer to the critics

of 1919 and give food for thought to those of 1955. They may argue about the role our citizen army is to play in the next world war, should it come, but they need have no doubts about the spirit in which it will be carried out.

I am deeply grateful to those who have helped me: to the War Office, who have made the official record freely available, to those of the 4th Battalion, The Royal West Kent Regiment, who have given me advice and encouragement; and to John Rayner and Deirdre Wheatley.

A.F.C.

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Flight from Battle

I WAS sweating. I had been sweating for six months, for it was hot in the Arakan that winter; hotter than even the oldest of the Arakanese could remember. No cool breeze came from the Indian Ocean, only a heavy moisture, which hung in the air, and the monotonous sound of the swell breaking on the pure white sand of the coast line. Rain fell at night, but brought little relief from the all-embracing heat; it only added to the humidity, for the sun sucked the water out of the ground each morning in a steamy mist. In the bamboo thickets which grew all over the hills there was no breath of air so that the heat in there seemed even more intense, and the silence too.

The Arakan, that narrow coastal strip of Burma running down from Chittagong almost to Rangoon, was a tangled mass of bamboo and jungle growing on small steep hills. The only clear-cut feature was the high Mayu Range, which split in two the northern half of the strip. There was a thin belt of land between this range and the sea. Behind it lay a deep valley and beyond that the jungle, stretching for hundreds of miles to the north and to the east; to the north over the Chin Hills; to the east over unknown tracts of the Arakan Yomas falling vertically into the great Irrawaddy Plain.

I sat on the ground in the corner of a small tent, watching the drops of sweat running down my chest and dripping over the folds in my stomach, until they disappeared in small rivulets into the open flaps of my olive green slacks. I had nothing to do but watch the sweat running down me and whittle away at the end of a bamboo stick with a small pen-knife. The canvas roof collected the heat and concentrated it on to the small patch of ground inside so that the shade gave little relief except from

the glare of the sun. It was easy to sit there, just sweating, and watching Douglas at work.

He was sitting opposite me on an ammunition box at a small camp table. A cigarette hung loose from his mouth, the smoke curling up and losing itself in the ends of his red moustache. Douglas always had a good supply of cigarettes, though for most of us they were hard to come by. He had them sent out from England—Churchman's Number One—a thousand at a time, and wherever he was, they seemed to arrive regularly. With the whole Army on a ration of seven cigarettes a day, we envied Douglas his regular supply. Sometimes we shared it, but he was a heavy smoker. On the table were piles of proformas and he was stripping them down one by one and entering figures in the various columns. They were aircraft loading manifests and the name, rank and number of every man flying in certain aircraft had to be shown on them, with details of the weapon and baggage that flew with him. As he filled in the forms, he used a piece of green blotting paper under his right hand to keep them clean and this was wet with sweat. While he worked he kept brushing away the flies which settled in clouds on the damp papers. He too was stripped to the waist and I could see under the table how worn were the knees of his slacks and the soles of his black marching boots.

After watching him for a while I said, "How the hell you can work on those figures in this appalling heat is beyond me."

Douglas answered, "It's khushi, old boy. You've got a battalion's worth of men, so many mules and weapons and so much kit. You know what they all weigh, taken on an average, and you've got to fit them into a number of Dakotas and C.46s. You know what the aeroplanes can lift and, given the weights, it's just a matter of simple division."

I said, "It would be a lot easier if some of us had been in these things before."

He answered, "I don't see how that helps. I don't suppose more than half a dozen of the men in this unit have flown before, but we haven't got to the flying stage yet. We're just fitting them in on paper like a lot of ciphers; and I like ciphers; there's method about them and none of this blasted human element which you chaps have to consider all the time."

I dragged myself to my feet and looked over his shoulder. He handed me a sheaf of papers and said, "You might check

these for me. I know it's just a lot of coggage to you, but if you have a look at column two and see that the figures there add up to the total in column three, that's all I want." I sat down again in the corner and thumbed through the proformas. They seemed all right; they were bound to be if Douglas Short worked them out. He did not make mistakes with figures, nor with any other form of record. Method was his god; that is why the C.O. had made him Adjutant.

Soon my attention began to wander and I gazed out of the open tent flaps on to the airstrip. It was not much of a place. Somebody had looked at a map and seen that there was a flat stretch of ground at Dohazari and there they had decided to build an airfield. There was only one runway, about two thousand yards long; a gleaming white strip cut out of the green jungle. On the far side a few clearings had been hacked out of the bushes to make room for tents for the airmen. Beyond and above the tents were the hills, running back layer on layer into a blue haze. The hills themselves were covered with dense forest and on the nearer slopes showed all shades of green. On the higher hills, the greens merged, all into one shade, and beyond them, on the farthest ranges, the mist lay like a blue sheen over the jungle.

There were other clearings round the airstrip, about two or three thousand yards away, and in these were the 3.7 inch anti-aircraft guns, manned by bearded Sikhs. I could see one of the guns at the far end of the strip, the long gleaming barrel pointing skyward, moving slowly up and down as the gun crews practiced their drills. The Sikhs were good gunners and only three days before had brought down a Japanese Zero as it was strafing transport aircraft on the strip. But much of their time was spent in the monotony of watching and waiting, for the Spitfires had knocked most of the Zeroes out of the sky that winter.

Douglas finished his work and I asked him, "What's this journey in aid of? Where are we going and what are we supposed to be doing next?"

He answered, "I haven't the faintest idea. The old man isn't allowed to tell."

I was getting well accustomed to this phrase by now. I was supposed to be the intelligence officer of the battalion. I was supposed to find out what the enemy was doing, to get into his

mind and estimate what he was going to do next; yet every time the unit moved to a new place I was allowed to know who the enemy was only a day or two before we met him. It had been the same when the battalion was pulled out of the pursuit after the Alamein battle and sent off at a moment's notice to join the 5th Indian Division at Qassassin. It was a dreadful experience being dragged out of the old 44th Division, which we had come to know so well, and being sent to a new Division of which we knew little. The move, of course, was all mystery and nobody knew where we were going. In the desert we had known just where we were going—to Tunis—and we were going there fast. But now apparently there were new fields to conquer, or so we thought, until we were ordered to move by road to Baghdad. It was a long journey—over a thousand miles—and when we arrived there was nothing to do but sit around in the deserts of Iraq and, when we could, sample the race meetings and cocktail parties, the night clubs and brothels of Baghdad.

Just as we were settling down there was another move, on the *Empire Trooper*, an old German Baltic cruise vessel, and it brought us, after an enforced delay in the terrific heat of Abadan, to India. We arrived in Bombay to a brass band reception and to grave warnings that irresponsible talk about the fighting ability of the Japanese was liable to have a bad effect on the British troops. We laughed at this, for we had heard no such talk and after breaking the line at Alamein, manned, as it was, by the Afrika Korps, we had no fears about taking on the Japs. But still no news of our destination, until, at the end of five days crammed like cattle into a troop train, we arrived at a bleak expanse of scrub and paddy-fields in the Bihar jungles and a temperature of a hundred and fourteen degrees in the shade. The place had a name: Chas, and here, and at Lohardaga, we were to train. But not for long, for four months later in October, 1943, we moved to the Arakan. Just before we moved, John Lavery took command.

There was no difficulty over the move; a few hundred miles by train, a pleasant sea journey from Calcutta to Chittagong, another fifty miles by train and fifty more by road, marching through the intense heat and the dust lying thick on the unmetalled tracks. We marched by night and lay up by day until we crossed the border into Burma and found ourselves locked

in battle with the Japanese. It was then, and not a moment before, that I really began to learn something of the enemy we were up against.

For six months we fought them on the southern front. We fought them at points 121 and 141; on the Tortoise; at the Ngakyedauk pass. We fought them on operation Markhor and, while we fought, we learnt a lot that we had not learnt in the desert. We learnt never to attack the Japs frontally, for they were stubborn in defence, but rather to move round them under cover of the jungle, to cut off their supplies and attack them from behind. We learnt how difficult it was to patrol either by day or by night in country where you could not see more than five yards in any one direction. We learnt that the Jap soldier was brave almost to the point of insanity and would never give up his position until every man in it had been shot or bayoneted to death. We learnt how to deal with the Jap bunkers, strong underground defences with the weapon slits built up of logs and bamboo. And we learnt how to live in the filth of the jungle, in the stifling heat, amid foul disease and a million insects; we learnt how lonely a jungle is after the comradeship of the desert.

Meanwhile, I discovered something of the mind of the Japanese soldier and his leaders. All were incredibly tough, well disciplined, well trained. None had any fear of death. Both soldiers and leaders, when given orders, would carry them out to the last letter, even though the battle situation might require a change of action. I discovered that these brave men were frightened of only two things, the man immediately senior to them and capture. This was useful knowledge.

Yes, we learnt quickly in the dense thickets and on the steep hills of the Arakan, and soon we were masters of the Japs so that the words they warned us of in Bombay were never spoken. After a little while we no longer pulled back before their encircling moves but, instead, they were pulling back before ours. In this way we worked slowly south, driving them before us, down from Chota Maungnama to Razabil and the tunnels, all the time forcing the Japs back; all the time gaining an ascendancy over them. Then, towards the end of March, 1944, when we were poised to strike the hardest blow of all, the orders came for us to pull out, back to Maungdaw, to Dohazari airstrip, to another unknown destination. It was

heartbreaking being pulled out of the line just when we were getting on top of them. It was bad enough for the men, but even worse for the officers who had to reason with them.

It meant nothing to the men that a front some hundred miles to the north-east was caving in, when that front was separated from them by a vast wilderness of mountain forest. It meant little to them that someone at a large and remote headquarters had failed to appreciate what the Japs could do, when their sole concern was finding the Japanese soldier who perhaps lay on the other side of the bush behind which they were sleeping and firing a bullet into him before he did the same to them. Because someone's appreciation went wrong the great base at Dimapur was threatened, the base on which the men's supplies depended; but the only supplies they had were bully and biscuits, seven mildewed cigarettes a day and just enough ammunition to see them through the next engagement. In any case, Dimapur was miles away and there were other troops in this 14th Army than the five hundred men of the 4th Battalion of the Royal West Kents. Christ Almighty! Let them take care of Dimapur and let us get on with bashing the Japs now that we've got them cold.

There was only one man who could explain these things to the soldiers, John Laverty, their Commanding Officer. I was sitting on the ground in front of him when he assembled the men at Maungdaw after their march back from the battleground. All sat facing him and he spoke to them quietly, with the merest suspicion of an Irish lilt in his voice. He knew as he spoke that every word counted; that the morale of these men depended on what he said. Somehow he made each one feel that he alone could save the situation in Burma and that what lay ahead was not a bloody battle, but a great adventure. And he did this without giving anyone an inkling of where he was going or how he was going to get there. This news was still top secret.

The tent was growing hotter now, for it was 10 a.m. and the sun was already high. I walked out on to the airstrip and across to the control room, a small-type Nissen hut, where the station commander waited impatiently for the men to arrive. As soon as he saw me he said, "When the devil are your types coming along? They look like being late already. There'll be hell to pay if they are. The kites come in tomorrow morning."



I said, "I'm expecting them any minute now. They've had a rotten journey one way and another, but you can be sure they'll arrive today."

Yes, I had been glad to be sent ahead and so miss the worst of the journey. After ~~John's~~ talk at Maungdaw the men had been put on river flats, packed tight so that there was no room to move even an arm or leg, ready for the journey to Taungbro. No sooner had they embarked than the news came through that the troops who had relieved us forward were in trouble and we were to prepare to go and help them. The men disembarked. After sitting around all night, while rumour flew from mouth to mouth, they were once again told to embark, so they filed back on to the flats, regimented into straight lines by the sergcant-majors. It was important that the lines should be straight for one man out of place meant one less crowded on to the deck space. The flats looked like huge covered-in barges, their decks only eighteen inches above the water, and they were drawn by tugs, two or three flats to each tug. They moved up the river in convoy, while the crush of men and mules took what rest they could in the fierce heat.

The men then marched from Taungbro to Dohazari, a hundred miles of rutted roadway, thick with dust. They marched in single file in sections of eight or nine men, alternate sections on opposite sides of the road. The four fighting companies were divided between the head and tail of the long column and in the middle were the headquarters men and the mules. On their right the Mayu Range rose abruptly into the bright sky and on their left the bamboo and the jungle fell away to the sea. Every few hundred yards the road crossed a chaung by a bridge of logs which elephants had laid under the supervision of British engineers when we first went to war in the Arakan. The march was timed to take seven days—seven days of sweating, of breathing in the fine dry dust, of stumbling through the long hours of darkness, for it was too hot to march by day. I told the Wing Commander that it was possible that they might be an hour or two late.

We sat talking for a while in the control room. There were not more than half a dozen people in the shack, and four wireless sets. These men were responsible for the traffic on the airstrip and, because a complete division of fifteen thousand men was being flown over a period of a week to the northern

front, a heavy responsibility rested on their shoulders. No wonder the Wing Commander was worried.

But even as we spoke, the noise of singing drifted through the hot still air. The song was well known by all men in the unit, for the tune can be heard in any canteen or mess at any time, and the silly words had been written somewhere in the jungle and had been passed by word of mouth along the tiny tracks through the bamboo forests and over the hills until all the men had heard them:

“Japs on the hilltop
Japs in the Chaung
Japs on the Ngakyedauk
Japs in the Taung
Japs with their L. of C. far too long
As they revel in the joys of infiltration.”

As we looked across the runway we could see the dust kicked up by the column rising above the treetops. I turned to the Wing Commander and said, “This is it—and they sound in good form.” The Wing Commander looked relieved, but said nothing.

John Harman

LANCE-CORPORAL JOHN HARMAN was bored. He had been bored ever since the coming of war compelled him to join the Army, dragging him away from the complete life he found on the island of Lundy where he loved so well the rugged coastline and the friendship of animals and birds in the rocks and on the crags. His father, city engineer and stamp collector, bought the place some years before, when his son was still a boy and, since an early age, the boy's interests had lain there as much as in the normal fellowship of the world outside. The sea sounds thrilled him; he found exhilaration in the weird wailing of the wind round the great house; he would watch for days on end the busy life of ships and boats in the wide estuary. School meant little to him, though the masters were kind and he was good at games, because the work bored him so that he spent each term looking forward with passionate longing to the holidays and to the wild loneliness of Lundy.

Like most young men with wealthy parents he travelled abroad during holidays, though these journeys held little appeal for him unless they took him to Spain. In this country of wide space and warm people he was at ease, and it was only a few miles from Madrid that he met the remarkable old sage who held more influence over him than any other being. This dried-up old man had introduced him to spiritualism while he was little more than a boy, arousing in him a warm interest. The sage was able to tell him what was happening at his home on Lundy at any given time and always, on the boy's return from Spain, the sage would be proved right. The old man foretold that John Harman would live to be seventy years old. There were times when the young man took the prophecy in complete

confidence; there were times when the lance-corporal entertained doubt.

He was a well-built youth, five feet ten inches tall, with huge shoulders and a great barrel of a chest. His square head, set on a thick neck, was crowned by a mop of unruly black hair which had no parting and fell in a fringe over his low forehead. He could have looked moronic but for his eyes, two startling features which would cling to the memory when the rest of his face was forgotten. They were the eyes of an introvert; they seemed always to be looking inwards, examining, criticizing, yet in them lay kindness and a deep understanding.

Army life was the antithesis of everything he was used to. Men were everywhere, crammed up against him on the square, in the dining-halls, in canteens, sleeping, even, within a yard of him, one each side. Though naturally untidy, he cleaned and polished and stamped his feet endlessly, at the beck and call of loud-mouthed N.C.O.s and indifferent officers. Somehow he had to get along with these men, being kind and helpful to them, as they helped him; he had to do this because they were training together for war. To a degree he succeeded, for he made a few friends and many acquaintances. But he was essentially an individualist; what he had to do he liked to do alone. If there was blame attached he would accept it; if kudos, he would revel in the limelight, though he never boasted of his achievements.

He trained initially as a trooper in the Household Cavalry so that he was able to enjoy the companionship of the magnificent troop horses placed in his charge. Soon these were removed and their places taken by impersonal monsters, tanks and armoured cars. John Harman transferred to the infantry. There followed more training, then a succession of reinforcement camps all over the world, in which he waited endlessly with nothing to do until some unit in the desert, in the jungles or in the mountains claimed him.

In the course of time he was drafted to the Royal West Kents, joining them in the Arakan. He knew nothing of the regiment, but was at once forced to absorb their customs and traditions. These were things he understood, milestones in the history of a proud regiment and a great nation, and he took to them readily. But the jungle was dull, with never enough action to fill his days and nights; all the time looking for the enemy,

for the Japs, always looking, patrolling, reporting, with only now and then a short action, a little excitement which soon died away when the enemy disappeared, only to have to be found again. Even the few actions left him with little stimulation.

As a private his job was to obey orders, stupid as some of them were; he seldom had to think. When it was a matter of pushing a bayonet into a man's guts before he pushed one into yours, there was not much time to think; you just pushed and pushed until the man on the end of the bayonet went limp and then you pulled it out and looked for another one. He thought, sometimes, of taking a stripe himself because of the idiocy of some of the orders he was given. As a private, if he objected or suggested a better way, as he often did, officers and N.C.O.s would be angry and tell him to do what he was told. Perhaps the best way out was to start giving orders himself, but, though his education fitted him for leadership, he did not really want to lead and he was by no means sure that men would follow him. No, he was an individualist, one who found it easier to go out and kill the Japs on his own, an exercise which gave him no qualms for they looked little better than the wild beasts they were.

So he stayed as a private with few friends, until he met Donald Easten, a friendly and charming officer in his own company who at last persuaded him to take his stripe. This was only a week or two before and the young man was not yet used to the feel of the thing on the arm of his bush shirt. But even with his stripe the lance-corporal was bored, never more so than now, shuffling, as he was, along a dusty road through the darkness with eight men behind him; the eight men who made up his section. He was responsible for these men; he had to think for them; he had to see that they were provided with clothing, food and ammunition and anything else they might need to fight with. It was not an arduous job because there was always someone else above who seemed only too keen to interfere; he was happy to let them do it. Now and then on the march he looked back to ensure that the men were closed up behind him, but they knew how to march as well as he did and he had little doubt that they would be.

He had been marching, mostly at night, for the best part of a week. There was nothing to think about except putting

one foot in front of the other and whether he would fall into the next deep chaung which he knew would suddenly appear right at his feet only a hundred or two hundred yards in front. He had to concentrate on crossing the rough boles of the bridges over these tidal ditches until he hit the road on the other side when he could relapse again into mental inertia. As he plodded on the dust came up into his face and nostrils and ears and head and right into his mind, stifling what little interest he had in the men behind him. Now and then a staff car or truck would pass down the road, going too fast and throwing further clouds of dust over the men as they cursed the driver through parched throats. The night seemed endlessly long and he wondered whether at the end of it they would arrive at their destination. He did not know where it was; he did not care very much, except that the journey's end would mean taking the weight off his feet.

He had bad feet and the thought recurred at moments like this that perhaps he would have done better in the gunners or the cavalry where there always seemed to be a vehicle to drive in. He remembered the ridiculous fuss there had been about fitting him with boots. His feet were different sizes and the Army did not make boots for odd sized feet, so he had made up a pair from a couple of Japs he had killed. They fitted him perfectly and he thought it amusing when he wrote home and told his father the story. But his father did not think it funny and wrote to his member of Parliament and then there was trouble. But he was still wearing the Japs' boots and they were carrying him along this endless road of dust.

Dawn broke at last, the light coming quickly into the sky. As he looked about him he saw on the roadside the wastage of war; a light tank tilted into a ditch, its gun buried and its body covered with thick rust—he wondered for a moment what had happened to the crew; broken vehicles in the rice fields where the drivers had left them, either because they were dead or because they wanted to escape from the steel and fire which was shattering their charges; two dead mules covered with a seething mass of bluebottle flies—they stank, and he supposed that they had been left there to die because their use was finished.

There was nothing else to see except the bare brown paddy fields and the jungle beyond them, and the Mayu Range rising

abruptly on his right—that great ridge of forested hills of which Colonel Tanahashi had said, “The Mayu Range is a fortress given to us by heaven to furnish us with defences, obstructions and concealments; with water, with quarters, with supplies of building materials unlimited. Indeed, a thing of immense value. Its mountains and rivers will shortly become an unforgettable battleground.” He spared a thought for the Japanese colonel now fighting desperately for the few remaining ramparts of his heaven-sent fortress.

There was no sound except the murmur of the sea over on his left, the engines of the cars and trucks which now and then came rattling down the road, the shuffling of tired feet in the dust. The men behind him, and in front, had long since been stifled into silence.

The daylight did little to relieve the lance-corporal's boredom; he had almost forgotten what it was like not to be bored. All he had to look forward to during the march was the next halt for a meal, when he and his section would squat by the roadside and make little fires with their Tommy cookers and put the bully beef into mess tins to warm it before shovelling it into their mouths with tin spoons. They would wash it down with a mug of tea and then they were ready to move on again. The next meal, the journey's end, were all that lay ahead.

The sun was high and burning when the word came back down the line that they were nearing the airstrip. At once the men started singing because they felt that this must be the end of the march. Before they started he knew what song they would choose:

“Japs on the hilltop
Japs in the Chaung
Japs on the Ngakyedauk . . .”

and he was glad they chose it because he wanted so much to join in the singing. It was the only barrack-room tune he knew.

He saw the adjutant on the edge of the airstrip, watching the tired and dirty men file past. He wondered idly what the officer knew about their next job and why he did not tell them what they were going into. It was of little concern to him for he knew that whatever it was, it would be much the same pattern as he had been following for the past six months—looking for a

Jap and then killing him, then looking for another and killing that one—but he was sensitive enough to know that the rest of his section would be asking him, "Where are we going and what are we going to do and why have we been pulled out of the last scrap when we were doing so well?" It made him feel a bloody fool not to know the answers.

Then all at once there was noise and action all around him. The Regimental Sergeant-Major was there, strutting up and down as though on the barrack square. He yelled, "Come on you. What's your name? 'Arman isn't it? Well, there's your billet, over there: get your men settled in and get 'em in quick. We've only got eighteen hours 'ere and kipping's the order. So get their bloody 'eads down." Harman looked in the direction he was pointing and saw a strip of jungle near which other men were already pitching there bivouacs. He turned and said, "Come on chaps, over here, we've got to make camp." He was slightly surprised when the men followed him and set about doing what he told them.

The R.S.M. was no friend of his. He was a Regular and had a mind as broad as a thread of cotton. He lived for the Army and seemed to enjoy it and Harman just could not understand how he got any fun out of it. But he had to admit that he looked the part—smart, alert—and, however tired they were, the men jumped to it when he was around. He had a formidable presence and unbounded energy which went before him as he moved about the unit so that you seemed to know he was coming before you actually saw or heard him. You normally heard him first.

He walked over to the patch of scrub which was to be their home for the night and, first looking to see what the next section was doing, ordered his men to do likewise. They took off their packs and opened up the ground sheets, grey rectangular strips of waterproof stuff. They paired off and, running a piece of string between two bushes, slung the ground sheets over the string; they pegged down the corners and this was their house. They put their kit inside—what there was of it; one pack each with a change of clothing in it, some washing kit, spare food and the odds and ends that every soldier seems to collect on the battlefield, however remote it may be. Then they squatted outside the bivouacs and tried to make up for all the talking they had missed during the long night marches,

while they cleaned their weapons and tried to remove the worst of the dirt from their bodies. Later, if they were lucky, they might have a bathe in a nearby stream. Every now and then an officer or N.C.O. would come along and take away this man or that for some fatigue connected with the move, so that all the time there was a ceaseless coming and going throughout the camp and a general air of activity.

It was not until after lunch that the camp quietened down and Harman realized that his section and a number of other men had been detailed as a plane-load and they were to fly somewhere on the following morning. God knows how he was going to coax his lot into an aeroplane. He took the trouble to ask them and discovered that not one of them had flown before and nor had he, but he supposed that it would work out all right somehow. It mattered little to any of these men, living, as they were, in constant discomfort and near to death, how they moved from one battle to another. The way they liked least was on their feet and an aeroplane was little different from a truck or train or a boat, except that it carried them towards danger much faster.

So they settled down in the meagre shade offered by their ground sheets and dozed the hot afternoon away, until, at dusk, the shouting and movement started again when the evening meal was served. The cooks had made a stew on their field cookers of tinned meats and vegetables and they served with it the inevitable mug of tea. The men lined up in long queues with their mess tins in one hand and their mugs in the other and while the cooks ladled the meal into the men's containers a constant flow of ribaldry and laughter moved up and down the queues and passed in between them. The men slouched back to their bivouacs and squatted in little groups as they ate and drank. Then those of them who had one smoked a cigarette before crawling back underneath the ground sheets and settling down to sleep. It was early for sleep, only six-thirty in the evening, but it was nearly dark and there was nothing else to do.

Harman, though utterly tired, could not sleep at once. Instead, he lay talking to the private soldier who shared his quarter. The handsome, olive-skinned Mathews was one of his few friends because he found him easy to approach, even though his conversation never rose far above the navel. His hobby was

judies and now that he was far separated from any possibility of contact with women, he talked about them. He was ending a long dissertation on the subject, "Look 'ere John—I mean Corp'—funny that stripe on yer bloody arm, can't get used to it meself, see—what I'd like right now is a good fat judy—soft an' easy-like—lyin' back an' waiting for it—Cor, wouldn't 'arf set me up, that wouldn't."

Harman said, "I don't know where you get the energy from, Jim."

He answered, "Yer don't need none o' that; why, a couple o' good bashes sets yer up proper—sleep like a bloody log yer would, see."

Harman wondered what it would be like to have a couple of good bashes—he had never tried it. And while he wondered, he slept.

They were up before dawn and once again the camp bustled with activity. Breakfast was served; the men washed and shaved as well as they could in the half light of the early morning. They took down their little bivouac tents and rolled up the ground sheets and strapped them carefully to the back of their packs. They cleaned their weapons again and swept all the debris of occupation from the ground.

As soon as it was light enough for the pilots to land the aircraft started coming in. They came in a stream following one another at one-minute intervals; first the long dark grey Commandos and then the fat and handy little Dakotas. The organization on the airstrip was amazingly efficient. As each plane landed, five vehicles appeared from nowhere and dashed out to meet it as it drew to a standstill. There were two great petrol tankers which parked themselves one under each wing while men trailed out long white hose pipes and fixed them to the wings. Then other men set engines in motion, engines built into the tankers which pumped fuel into the aircraft at tens of gallons to the minute. There was a jeep with a black and white check flag flying and the American Captain of Aircraft reported to this jeep and was checked in with the members of his crew. There was another jeep with a trailer attached and the crew, as soon as they had a moment to spare, hurried to the trailer, a field kitchen with a three-course breakfast cooking in the back. The crew took the breakfast out and squatted on the ground shovelling it into their mouths as fast as they could.

The fifth was a three-ton lorry which backed up to the aircraft doors when three Indians from the Pioneer Corps leapt out and started off-loading the returned stores and salvage which the crew had brought in with them. They had evidently come back from a forward airstrip.

These Commandos, C.46s, were American manned and the crews were in a hurry. It took them five minutes to eat their meal and then they were back in the fuselage, lashing the Indians into action, sweating and swearing and hurling the stuff into the lorry. No sooner had the lorry driven off than they were yelling at the men, "F'chrissake get movin' you land-bound limeys. Godammit, the war 'ain't goin' ter wait while you sit around a-scratchin' yer arses. F'chrissake. . . ." And the men grinned and said, "Hya, Bud," and "Keep yer — trap shut." But they stepped out and piled into the aircraft, quickly.

These Americans had one aim only and that was to get the war over as quickly as possible. Each one of them felt that if he could fit just one more flight into a day by reducing the time he spent on the ground, the war would be that much shorter. They were flying all day for seven days a week with little rest during their eighteen months in Burma. Every day was just twelve hours long, from six in the morning to six at night, and during this time they spent two and a half hours on the ground, unless by their own exertions they could reduce that time. Most of the flying was at ten thousand feet or higher because of the mountain ranges over which they had to fly; for these men, in the normal way, were flying over 'the hump' into China. The aircraft were not pressurized and the crew had no oxygen.

They were a tired, drawn-looking lot, unshaven and dirty. They worked and flew stripped to the waist, except for the Captain of Aircraft, who wore a scruffy bush jacket. They all lived for their work and had no interest outside it. At night they slept wherever they happened to be, while other Americans slaved during the hours of darkness to keep their aircraft in flying order. At this time two armies were being supplied by these American crews in their Commandos, supported by a few Dakotas of the R.A.F. There were never enough of them; the demands on the time and energy of both crews and machines were terrific. One would have thought that it was almost beyond their powers of endurance to meet them and yet—I was to learn later—they never failed to squeeze the last ounce

of carrying capacity out of their tattered machines. Even as I stood on the edge of the field watching the aircraft swallow up the men and the mules and the baggage, amazed at the desperate energy of the crews, I realized how much the soldiers owed these men.

The Commandos were loaded first, the men shuffling across in small groups as they were called forward and disappearing into the planes. As soon as the last man was in, the doors were pulled to and the aircraft taxied round and took off; then a minute later another one behind it and then another behind that. The Dakotas were reserved for the problem children, the mules. I watched them loading and saw the muleteers wrestling with their charges who seemed to know that an unpleasant experience was in store for them. Two large men were chosen to stand one on each side of the doorway at the top of the loading ramp. The muleteer chased his mule on to the ramp, and the creature slowly, unwillingly stamped its way up until its forefeet were inside the aircraft and its hind feet still on the ramp. It was at this stage that the mule realized that he must now make his last show of resistance and this was where the two large men came in. They had to choose the psychological moment and, joining their hands behind the mule's rump, in one mighty heave catapult the animal into the aircraft. It was work which I would have avoided at all costs, but I watched two privates—one I had never seen before, the other I knew, his name was Robins—hurling mule after mule into a Dakota until it was full and then cheerfully passing on to the next one. Once the mules were inside they were tethered in a line down the centre of the fuselage while the muleteers squatted uncomfortably on the floor at the back, facing their charges. I wondered what would happen if two or three mules broke loose during the journey. I never discovered, but I do know that of the fifty-four mules loaded at Dohazari, fifty-four reached their destination unscathed.

The jeeps, too, were loaded into Dakotas and this was a task for skilful hands. The jeep is as near human as any vehicle can be and each one resented being loaded into the small space through a side door. As with the mules the psychological moment came when the front wheels were in the fuselage and the rear still on the ramp. They received the same treatment as the mules but here, instead of one heave, the jeep had to be

bumped round by hand until it could be squeezed in down the length of the fuselage. In spite of its looks, the jeep is a heavy vehicle to lift and there were many to be loaded.

I watched the unit slowly disappear as the Commandos and Dakotas took off. As one stream left, another stream came in to fill the space they had left on the runway. The timing was perfect.

I was the last to leave with Harman's section and a few other men who had been helping to organize the loading. The men sat in bucket seats built into both sides of the fuselage. They sat with their rifles between their knees and their heads thrown forward by the curve of the airframe, so that their chins rested on their chests. Until we were airborne they chattered nervously, but soon the monotony of the vibration silenced them and, as British soldiers will anywhere, they slept—those of them who were not sick. There were no bags for the sick; they staggered down to the tiny lavatory at the back of the aircraft—those who reached it in time. The others just threw up on to the floor. There was one particularly bad passenger in Harman's section, Tich Young. He was sick all the time and, at the other end, the American crew made him clean up the mess.

We flew high because the country beneath us rose and fell steeply and the clouds, heralding the approach of the monsoon, were low on the hills. Through gaps in the cloud we could see the green wilderness below, mile after mile of tree-tops rising and falling with no sign among them of road or house. As the aircraft droned on, we dozed and smoked and were sick alternately, until the intense pain in our eardrums brought us to our senses and told us that we were going down to land.

Then I saw the airfield and the town beside it and recognized it as Dimapur. I had been there once before on a short visit soon after we reached the Arakan. The airfield was one sheet of water, as was the country all round, and I wondered how at this time of year, when the rainfall, in the Arakan at least, had been so little, there were floods up here. I could see the other Commandos in our stream landing one after the other in the water, throwing out white plumes behind them, and I was amazed at the skill of the pilots who brought them down without accident. We all landed safely and as soon as the doors were thrown open the American pilots were shouting and

chivvying and hurrying while the five vehicles splashed through the water to greet us. This time the unloading was simple; two sections of soldiers and one intelligence officer walked into the three-ton lorry. It drove away and joined the rest of the unit waiting in convoy on the road leading out of the town. No sooner had we joined them than they moved off and we found ourselves two hours later at milestone forty-two on the Dimapur-Imphal road.

Milestone forty-two was not much of a place to stay. The road was magnificent—two-way, macadam, all-weather—but here it ran up into the mountains so that on one side was a sheer rise of some thousand feet and on the other a steep drop into the valley below. Below the road the local Nagas had terraced the ground and it was on their fields that we pitched our camp. It was a crazy camp with every bivouac at a different level so that each man had to climb up or down two or three hundred feet to go to the latrines or collect his food from a cookhouse, or report to an officer for orders. But we were not going to be there long; so we slung up the ground sheets and put our packs underneath as pillows and tried to sleep off the effects of the journey while waiting for the next lot of orders.

I was not given long to rest. The C.O. sent for me and told me to go back to Dimapur to find out something about the military situation; to try and formulate some idea of what the Japs were up to and what they intended to do next. It was now for the first time that I discovered why we had been flown over the mountains—to hold Kohima against the Japanese onslaught, with two Indian battalions to help us. I grabbed a jeep and drove back to Dimapur which I had left only two hours before. Here was a vast wooden township of sheds and storehouses and railway sidings, holding sufficient supplies for a whole army for a year. The town was surrounded by barbed wire; each building had its own wire fence and slit trenches were everywhere, so that you had to tread carefully for fear of falling into them. You could move nowhere without showing an identity card and using a password. Yet the wire and the trenches and the passwords gave only an illusion of security, for there was no one to defend this base against the Japanese soldiers who had so suddenly appeared only a few miles away.

Two weeks ago the town had been far removed from war. The nearest enemy had been two hundred miles away, two

hundred miles of jungle-covered mountains with only one road running through them; and we held that road. But now the impossible had happened and two Japanese divisions, two of their best, had crossed those mountains by paths and game-tracks and had appeared on the road behind our holding forces.

The people of Dimapur were frightened people, men and women alike. The women were leaving in a hurry, and the men were ruled by rumour, both the civilians in the small bazaar and the base troops handling the stores in the depots. Rumour infected everyone so that it was difficult to find a true picture even from the intelligence people in the military headquarters. And here was I, a junior officer, wandering aimlessly about from headquarters to depot to store and back to headquarters, trying to make sense of the whole business. I knew my efforts would soon be put to the test—when John Laverty, the C.O., held his conference that afternoon. Thank God that at least I found one sane person to help me, a woman, one of the few who stayed behind

The Leaders

"GENTLEMEN, we move to Kohima this afternoon."

John Lavery was holding his conference. The stage had been set by Douglas in his usual orderly way. Douglas liked order, and so did the C.O.; that was another reason why he had made him Adjutant. There was a blackboard on one of the small terraces by the roadside with a map pinned to it. Facing the blackboard were seven chairs, wooden, folding, flat, drawn up in a semicircle, with another, beside the blackboard, for the C.O. The choice of ground was not a good one because there was too much traffic on the road for silence, but the C.O. had to be up there all the time so that visitors could find him easily. Near by, in case of rain, was a strange erection of ground sheets, built on to the side of a jeep. This was the C.O.'s office, but we would not go and talk in there unless we were forced to, because it was too cramped. God knows where Douglas had got the props from, but he had a way of getting hold of things wherever we went.

Sitting on the chairs and facing the blackboard were the Company Commanders. There was Tommy Kenyon who commanded 'A' Company, of medium height, slightly built, bold and forthright. He had been a volunteer citizen soldier for many years before the war, longer than any of us. He was thirty-three years old.

Next to him sat John Winstanley, commanding 'B' Company—they were all sitting in the right order—'A', 'B', 'C', 'D'—Douglas saw to that. The war found John a medical student at Bart's. He was young and gay then, as a medical student should be, but the war had aged him so that he looked older and more serious than his twenty-six years. He was tall and dark, good-looking, but always gave the

impression of being deep in thought, even when the battle raged.

Bobby Shaw sat next to him; Bobby, the stockjobber, the man who weighed up all the facts before taking action, even when the action required had to be fast and gave little time for thought. Every time he hit the nail on the head, whether he was deciding on promotion of some private to lance-corporal or theorizing on some vague calculation connected with the air supply in the jungle of an army of six divisions and two tank brigades.

Then there was Donald Easten, commanding 'D' Company, a country man, with a passion for hunting and for the countryside of Kent. He was tall, with the straightest of straight backs and an elegance which even his dirty jungle-green uniform failed to hide. He was a man of infinite charm.

There was Harry Smith, the schoolmaster, who treated his men like schoolboys; and they liked it, even the most hard-bitten, because he cared so much for them. He was small, smiling and rather diffident; in all his suggestions sound, in all his actions sincere. Support Company was his command, a mixture of the harder-hitting weapons in the unit and the men who fired them. In charge of the administrative company was Bryn Williams, of Customs and Excise, our memory man. After escorting us into Kohima, and bringing the transport out, he was to be our only personal link with the outside world.

On his right sat Peter Franklin, John's second-in-command, a large, round, amiable chap who was never worried by the load of responsibility which had fallen on his shoulders at so early an age, for he was no more than twenty-seven and, if John Laverty was killed, the party was his.

These were the leaders of the five hundred men who lay dozing in their bivouacs on the terraces below. Only two of them, Peter and John Laverty himself, had been trained as professional soldiers.

Douglas was there, taking notes and preparing to issue the orders which would follow the conference. We none of us had to worry about those orders; we knew they would confirm exactly what John wanted us to do. And then there was me; my turn was coming in a moment.

John Laverty continued, "The battle picture round here

seems somewhat confused and nobody knows what really is going on. I've been up to Brigade to get what I could and Willie has been to Dimapur. He'll tell you what we've been able to get hold of between us."

I went over to the blackboard and pointing to the map said, "On the fifteenth of March the Japanese crossed the Chindwin in force. Their 33rd Division has pushed back the 17th Indian Division from Tiddim, while their 15th Division has fallen on Imphal from south and north and has isolated the troops there. Meanwhile, their 31st Division has carried out a fantastic march across nearly two hundred miles of mountains and jungle and are now a few miles from Kohima, with some of them threatening Dimapur and the Ledo railway. Nobody knows exactly where any of them are, nor what tasks they've been given. What appears to be their 58th Regiment is fighting round Jessami and we think they're aiming for Kohima; we have a few irregular troops facing them. We think that their 138th Regiment is also moving on Kohima, through Maram or Pulomi, but how near they are, we don't know. According to the order of battle, the third Regiment in this Division is the 124th and nobody seems to have traced them yet, though there are several vague ideas that they are coming round east of Dimapur to cut the Ledo railway.

"I've had a look at the map and I've gone through every detail I've been told in the last few hours, whether fact or fiction, but I can't give you any firm idea of what the Jap commander is trying to do. I can only say that if I were the Jap I'd know that my lines of communication were far too long and my first aim would be to take food. The biggest dump within their reach is at Dimapur and that's why I think they'll go for Dimapur. The other thing I would spot if I were the Jap is the Ledo railway. As you know, this railway runs on from Dimapur to the 'hump' airfields and the northern front, and you know also that this is the only ground link between us and Calcutta. There's no road. In his place, I would consider it vital to cut this railway. I can't honestly see that Kohima is of much importance unless they want to use the main road between Imphal and Dimapur. They won't want to do this until they've made both those places firm. My guess is that their first objective is Dimapur and their second the Ledo railway. However, if General Sato Katetu, who commands

the 31st Division, has been told to capture Kohima, he'll do that or bust."

I sat down feeling very uncomfortable. I had rehearsed that speech carefully and I hoped it sounded confident, but I saw John give a slight shrug of his shoulders while I was talking and I realized that the others too must be thinking I had been of little help to them. But there was little more I could do. I was small beer in Dimapur and had never seen the place before except for one fleeting visit. I had gone into the vast collection of stores and dumps to find rumour rife and every man afraid of his own shadow. Not even in the headquarters was there anyone who knew what was going on. And yet, in a matter of hours, I was supposed to put myself in the mind of General Sato Katetu and appreciate the situation from his point of view; to decide what he was going to do with his division and how he was going to do it. Of course, I hadn't a clue, at least not until Pauline Meynard gave me a few. She was the wife of some poor devil commanding a Gurkha unit up in the Tiddim area and she was filling in her time as Intelligence Officer at Dimapur. She knew what she was talking about. The map in her office alone gave me confidence; it was neat and seemed to tell a story, even if only in vague outline. There was no panic in Pauline's heart and she told me just what she knew without any fancy guesswork.

At first I had trouble in taking it in. The issue skirts in India were short, very short, and you only had to be in the jungle for a couple of weeks for the sight of a woman's knees to set your body on fire for what lay beyond them. They were nice knees, covered with mesh nylon, and I switched my eyes from her knees to the map and back to her knees. But Pauline knew the form and waited for the fever to subside. Were it not for her, I would have cut an even worse figure. If only the C.O. had been able to tell me where we were going before we arrived, I would at least have been able to do a little preliminary research. But he didn't. When I told him what I had done, or rather failed to do, there was no word of reproach.

He took over from me in front of the blackboard and gave out a few brief orders. He did not say much: just that we were to take up a defensive position in Kohima, the details of which we would find when we arrived. The trucks would arrive to take us up at 1600 hours and the order of march would be 'A'

Company, Battalion Headquarters, 'D', 'C', Support and 'B' Companies. He arranged that a party of guides would go on ahead to meet us and show us into our positions. That was all. John Lavery did not believe in giving long-winded orders; he gave us the essentials and expected us to fill in the detail.

While he was speaking there was constant traffic moving up and down the road; three-tonners in long crawling convoys taking stores up to Kohima, some of them destined, perhaps, for Imphal, but never to get there, because the Japs had cut the road; despatch riders here and there, keeping the convoys in order; jeeps and staff cars taking officers of the Service Corps to some point on the road from which they could best keep their vehicles moving.

Coming back from Kohima were more three-tonners, full of men—most of them huddled up in the backs of the vehicles, silent and comfortless. But there were others who were not silent, men with torn bodies and twisted limbs. For them the long journey in the ill-sprung lorries was torment, as each jolt sent a fresh pang of agony through their tortured bodies. Coming back, too, were jeeps and staff cars with officers in them; officers of fighting units who had gone forward to see what was happening in front and officers of the administrative units in Kohima wondering what was happening behind. As we watched the constant stream of laden trucks, we wondered why so many were coming away from Kohima. We were soon to find out.

The meeting dispersed and I went down the terraces with Bobby to where his men were assembled. Dodo Watts, Bobby's second-in-command, had them seated on the ground and was standing in front waiting for his commander to arrive. Dodo, to look at, was a Billy Bunter, large, round and smiling, but his brain was good and he had taken readily to soldiering from student life at Oxford. He was a much wounded officer, but nothing affected his perpetual cheerfulness and, like Bunter, he was always coming back for more. Between battles and wounds and travelling between hospitals and convalescent depots, he played bridge, and he played well.

The men were sitting in a huddled group behind him. They were smoking and talking quietly together and enjoying a few moments at peace in the hot sunshine. They had known very few such moments during the last six months and they were

tired, these men; you could see it in their drawn yellow faces. The yellow tinge in their skins was not fatigue, but mepacrine, the little yellow tablets they had to take each day to ward off malaria. It was the hollow cheeks, the dark circles under the eyes, the tiny lines running across the forehead and outward from the eyes and down from the corners of the mouth that told you they were tired. The yellow from the mepacrine only underlined these marks.

As Bobby came up, Dodo called the men to their feet. They did not jump up as soldiers do on the parade ground, but dragged themselves upright and stood with their feet slightly apart and their bodies drooping forward. They had long since learnt how to conserve energy in the frightful heat by reducing movement to the minimum necessary. Bobby at once told them to sit down.

He said, "I'm not going to give you any orders—I'll pass those on through your platoon commanders, but I'll tell you what's going on so far as anyone knows it, and I can tell you now that no one knows very much." I don't think Bobby looked at me, but I felt the shaft go home. "The 'I' wallahs tell us that a division of Japs, that's fifteen thousand of 'em, have come from God knows where after a hell of a march over the mountains. They've cut off Imphal, which is sixty-five miles up the road that way, and are now coming for Kohima, which is five miles away in the same direction, or Dimapur, which is where your aircraft landed. Both these places are good bases and there's a lot of food and ammunition and so on in 'em. The Japs want these because they're nearly two hundred miles away from their own bases and if they don't get them they'll starve. Well, it's our business to see that they don't get them and the first place we have to stop them getting is Kohima. We're going up there this evening and when we arrive we have to dig in and hang on like hell.

"Now, I might as well tell you that you're likely to be messed about. As I said before, nobody really knows what's going on, nor where the main Japanese threat is. We, the West Kents, and the other two battalions in the Brigade, are the only fighting troops about here, so we're going to be thrown in wherever the threat develops. All right, it's developing at the moment round Kohima, but tomorrow it may be Dimapur or somewhere else, so it's no good beefing if you find yourselves

one day here and another there. You'll just get down where you're told and you'll keep the Japs out. And I can tell you this, that other people may not be able to do it, but we can. The C.O. knows that and so does the Brigadier and so do a lot of other people round here, so you can bet your bloody boots that if there's a really bloody job the West Kents will be asked to do it. Right! Get back to your billets. Platoon Commanders and you, Dodo, stay with me. I'll give you your orders."

Bobby talked fast, too fast I thought, but whatever I thought, the men seemed to understand what he was driving at. None of them asked any questions but all shambled off down the terraces to settle to some more waiting and sweating. Meanwhile Bobby gave his orders.

He gave them quickly; he used more words than perhaps a regular officer would who had been brought up to use the minimum number essential and none at all if this were possible, but the young men he spoke to understood quite clearly what he wanted.

Before they left I had a few words with Dodo. He had a message pad in his left hand and he had taken down his orders in Greek. He saw me looking at them and grinned—"Good language, Greek," he said, "especially when you're bored and God! this waiting about gets me down." It seemed to me that there had been very little waiting about during the last six months, but then, I wasn't Dodo Watts.

Sharp at 1600 hours, forty three-tonners drew up along the stretch of road bordering the camp. The leading lorry parked exactly level with the forty-second milestone and the others stretched back for a mile down the road. There was little need to spread them out for we seldom saw Jap aircraft; the Spitfires had taken care of them. I walked down the convoy looking at the drivers and assessing the odds against us getting to Kohima. I talked to their officers and they told me that most of the men had been driving for only four days. They were Indians, and many of them had never seen a car, let alone a lorry, before being recruited from remote villages in the jungles of Southern India, or in the deserts of the Punjab, or in the mountains of the Himalaya, and brought in to training centres and taught to drive. They were given uniforms and rifles and four days' instruction before being herded into trains for Dimapur. There they were sorted into units and put into lorries to drive them

up and down, day and night and with little rest, on one of the most dangerous roads in the world; a road with a blind corner every four hundred yards and with sheer precipices on right and left. The chances of a safe journey looked slender indeed, but, as it turned out, these drivers took us to Kohima and back to Dimapur, then back to Kohima without accident.

The men were soon loaded, wedged twenty to each truck, while the balance of the lorries took kit. Then the convoy officers gave the signals, mysterious signs which can be understood only by those who deal with mechanical transport in mass, and the engines started and the convoy crept slowly forward.

As we crawled up the steep gradient the vast country opened out before us. On the left was a broad valley and beyond it the mountains rose steeply, all green, except where landslides had ripped the forests away, leaving giant scars. Along the first great ridge ran the road to Bokajan and Wokha; behind it were Firs Hill, Douglas Hill and MacRobert Hill. Beyond them we could see still higher mountains climbing up to seven and eight thousand feet and along their southern flank ran the track to Jessami. On the right the ridges hung over the road dropping away only where deep nullahs ran into them, nullahs which were bridged by the skill of the British engineers who had built this great highway. The ridges were all named: Jotsoma Ridge, Punjab Ridge, Terraced Hill and Picquet Hill, Bare Ridge and G.P.T. Ridge. We were to know these names well during the next three weeks. And behind the near ridges, though out of sight, were broad valleys and high peaks rising up to the greatest range of all, on which lay Pulebadze and Aradura Spur. Over this range the road ran onwards from Kohima to Imphal, a road on which we had spent tens of lakhs of rupees, but which was now useless, because the Japs were firm astride it.

To one brought up in England, to one who had fought in the fields of Flanders, in the flat wide-open desert and in the narrow confines of the Arakan, it was big country and wild country and the people who lived there, the Nagas, were wild too. Now and then we passed little groups standing on the roadside, watching the traffic go by. They were short, thickset men and women, with a proud bearing and massive shoulders. A typical mountain breed, they were, with dark skins and magnificent features; strong aquiline noses flattening out

towards the base; high Mongolian cheekbones; firm chins and thick lips. Unruly mops of thick black hair crowned their heads. They wore few clothes: the men short skirts, fastened round their loins with tape and, some of them, bright red blanket-capes; the women, thick saris. All wore bangles in their ears, and on their wrists and ankles, while round their knees were cane bands. Most carried hollow wooden gourds, rice-wine containers.

They lived in tiny villages on the mountain tops and it was only twenty years before that we had stamped out cannibalism and human sacrifice from among their customs. Some of them waved and smiled as we passed, for they were a friendly people; but others just watched. They cared little who moved along this strange creation of the white man—the road—and, in any case, the white man was mad. He had told them not to kill and scalp with their long curved knives, yet he himself was now killing in mass with shells and bullets and bayonets.

Slowly the convoy moved forward and ever upward to Kohima, the small township resting on a hilltop in the middle of this wild country. And there, as the sun was sinking behind the great Jotsoma Feature, Dodo Watts, Fred Collett, a champion race walker from Manchester, and John Steady, second-in-command of 'A' Company, were waiting to receive us and lead us into the fateful town. We moved in smoothly, climbing out of the trucks, climbing over the steep banks that lined the road and walking through forest for a few hundred yards to the patch of jungle which had been allotted to us. Dodo, Fred and John showed us the way and how to lay ourselves out on the ground. Then we started digging. When darkness fell, each man had dug himself a hole for the night and, after a hurried meal, all those who were not on watch lay down in the holes and slept.

There was no sound of battle anywhere around us, only the intense silence which comes over the jungle before the insects start their evening racket. As I sat in my slit trench listening to the silence, I wondered what lay in store for us. Here we were in Kohima, a place of such vital importance to us because it was built on the great highway, but of little moment to the Japs, so I thought. How soon was I to be proved wrong! As I drifted off to sleep it occurred to me that tomorrow was April Fool's Day.

The Fateful Town

APRIL FOOL'S DAY, 1914, a day of order, counter-order and disorder, and not one of them a firm order. As soon as the misty grey light of dawn filtered through the trees the men started digging again, digging themselves deeper into their jungle clearings, while John and I walked round to see the extent of the place we thought we might have to defend.

The town of Kohima, five thousand feet above sea level, straggled over a number of hill features. Its central point lay on the road junction where the main road from Dimapur to Imphal turned sharp south and was joined by the Jessami track. We started our walk from this point, turning north up the steep track on to a broad forested ridge. On this ridge was built a small wooden fort and it was in this area that most of our men were digging in. Their positions lay round the fort and stretched for some way down a narrow spur running south-east, on which lay a convalescent depot, the tin-roofed wooden huts all neatly aligned.

Further north, and overlooking the fort, was a broad plateau. Dotted among the trees on the high flat ground we could see the atap and tin roofs of the huts in the Naga village. For this part of the world it was a large village covering an area half a mile wide and a mile long. We walked up on to the plateau and turned to look back on the way we had come. In spite of the trees we could see from above details of the fort and the convalescent depot and the men moving to and fro between them; we could see, though the view was obscured a little, into the lovely gardens round the District Commissioner's bungalow and, beyond them, the spur running up to Summer House Hill. By moving a little to our right we could look over the valley into the hospital buildings on the reverse slopes of the bare and

terraced I.G.H. Spur. As we gazed down upon the main defence of the place John commented, "I pity those devils, and us, if the Japs get a footing up here."

We toured the village, noting the positions taken up on its outskirts by men of the Assam Rifles, then we made our way back down the track to the central road junction. We now took the steep drive leading off the main road up to the D.C.'s bungalow. The gardens on each side were well kept, the rich red blooms of the canna surrounding neat lawns. The bungalow itself, in dark wood, with a wide verandah, looked comfortable, even from the outside. In it lived the headquarters staff of the garrison.

Behind the bungalow a pathway climbed up the crest of the spur, past outhouses, past an attractive hard-surfaced tennis-court, past a large club-house and into the forest again, weaving its way round rhododendron bushes, climbing ever steeper. It passed over a small hillock, ran downhill for some fifty yards, then climbed steeply again on to the top of Summer House Hill.

On the hill the woods were thicker than in the village on the other side, but, looking back over the roof of the bungalow, we caught glimpses of the village, now on the same level as we were. To our right and left the ground dropped away suddenly to the main road cut tenuously into the hill side. Below it the ground fell sheer away into deep valleys carpeted with tightly packed tree tops.

We turned our back on the D.C.'s bungalow and walked south down the ridge over a series of bumps, each with a name, Kuki Picquet, F.S.D. Ridge, so named because a field supply depot was built on it, D.I.S. Spur which ran down almost to the level of the main road. We stood here on a steep bank, looking across the road at Jail Hill, rising close and menacing over our heads. Away to the right we could see dimly through the trees the outline of G.P.T. Ridge. John said, "Thank God we have some men up there. If we lose those two hills to the Japs the men on the ridge behind us won't have a chance." Then we jumped down on to the main road and returned to the area of the fort where our men were digging themselves still deeper into the unyielding soil.

At this time nobody knew how long we would stay, but we had to do something, for the place was in a shambles—a muddle of stores and storemen, fighting troops and administrative units,

mostly Indians, with no attempt made to knit them into one protected whole. We walked freely in and out of the depots and saw the apprehensive storemen busying themselves with stacking and issuing and accounting, but even before our eyes they were melting away. They had not been trained for battle, these men, and they were not going to stay while there was the slightest excuse for going. We saw the field supply depot and the hospital, the convalescent depot and the fort, all functioning in a half-hearted way and all except the field supply depot soon to be overrun. Only the wounded in the hospital seemed resigned to staying and facing what rumour foretold. There was little order in the place and no one seemed to be in control. No one knew where to look for guidance and, if they did look, it was not there.

Suddenly, just as we ourselves were settling down, the order came through that we were to leave the next day for Dimapur. John took the order with a shrug of his shoulders and told us to pass it on to the men. They did not take it with a shrug; they looked at the trenches and command posts they had won out of the hard soil and wondered why they had been asked to dig them. The officers had to try to tell them why. They looked back on a hectic day and a night of lost sleep, and wondered why they could not have been given this time for rest after six months of fierce fighting ending with their flight from the Arakan. The officers had to try to tell them why. Some of them thought back to Bobby Shaw's words of the day before and said, "Well, this is it, he said we'd got it coming to us," but wondered all the same why the top brass couldn't make up their bloody minds where to put them down without shovelling them up and down the road like a lot of cattle for market. The officers had to tell them why, and the officers had not much to go on. But it was they who had to lead these men and keep their spirits up, their minds and bodies ready for the supreme test of battle, today and tomorrow and the next day and all the days after that.

When the order to move came through, Peter Franklin went into action, loading up stores, putting the cooks on the lorries, assembling the headquarter company men, the men responsible for food and drink and supplies, and preparing them to move out ahead of the others. The fighting men were to leave last, and because the road curved round three sides of

the unit's position, most of the fighting men saw the cooks leave and they thought, 'We're off soon, back to where we've just come from; what a waste of bloody time.'

So the cooks and the sanitary orderlies, the ammunition men and the pioneers all left, and close behind them came the fighting men, loaded once again into lorries, bumping down the road. Because the road wound its way in and out through the fort, through the convalescent depot and the hospital, and through the field supply depot, the men there saw the battalion leave and panic was given further impetus. Amazement, bitterness, fear showed on even the most ignorant face as the last organized fighting unit left Kohima, while at the same time rumour told of the approach of tough, battle-experienced Japanese troops coming in from Bokajan, from Jessami, over Workshop Ridge and Aradura Spur, in fact from all sides except the one through which our own fighting men were escaping.

We went further back this time than the forty-second milestone, back even to the outskirts of Dimapur, back to fresh rumours and new orders and counter-orders, but back to some comfort, for they had pitched tents for us there. There was a N.A.A.F.I., too, and perhaps, if we had not been sent somewhere else by then, the mobile cinema might come this evening and show the men some ancient film.

Desperately we tried to get news of Kohima and what the enemy were doing there, but even John Laverty, who visited Brigade and Garrison Headquarters, and anywhere else where information might be held, learnt little. The fog of war had closed down over the mountain town and was lying thick on the great jungle-clad hills around it. Deep in those jungles were hidden the secrets we wanted to know, but they were guarded not only by the jungle but by a cunning, ruthless and brave enemy.

It was not until next evening that the jungle began to give up those secrets and it gave them to a young boy just out from school. His name was Smith; though only eighteen years old he looked younger, for his hair was fair and his pink face was round and smooth. He had taken a patrol in armoured carriers up to the outskirts of Kohima, up the whole length of the forty-six miles of dangerous roadway. He had taken it through in broad daylight to bring back news that the Japanese were already attacking the town from the south and were threatening from

the east and north. It was then obvious that somebody would have to go back and an hour later the order came through that it was to be us. We were to move up again at six-thirty the following morning.

John Laverty at once spoke to all the men in an open space between the tents. He told them what he knew in confident words and manner of which he was master. As he spoke the whole business made sense to them and he made them feel that once again they had been chosen for the difficult job because they were the only ones who could do it. He looked a little into the future and told them that there was a long and bloody battle ahead. Tired as they were, a ripple of excitement ran through the troops; their chests swelled and a sparkle came into their eyes. They left the meeting, not in the usual slouching gait, but with resolute tread, chatting among themselves, guessing wildly at what lay in store.

Lance-Corporal Harman listened to his men's talk as they sat in a little group eating their evening meal. It was a good meal, for there was plenty of food in Dimapur, and they filled their bellies, as soldiers will whenever they get the chance, for they are never quite sure when they will be able to fill them again. Mathew was saying, "I bet we're in for a bloody time up there. They wouldn't be sending us unless there was bags of trouble about. I'll bet the place is lousy with the little yellow bastards, see."

Harman answered, "The more Japs there are, the more chance you'll get of killing 'em, and that's what you're here for."

Tich Young chipped in, "It's time some other —s took them on. We get into all the bloody hot spots."

Harman said, "Don't worry, the others are all getting their bucket of blood: there's plenty of work for all, and plenty of Japs."

He settled them down to sleep as soon as they had finished eating. Sleep was at a premium; they could ill afford to waste time in idle chatter.

At 4.30 a.m. we were on the move again, loading the kit and the men into one more great winding convoy of three-ton lorries. Two hours later we moved off, but not entirely alone, for with us came a platoon of some forty-five men of the 2nd Field Company, Indian Sappers and Miners, a detachment

of the 75th Indian Field Ambulance and the 20th Mountain Battery of the Indian Mountain Regiment. The gunners were Sikhs and the guns were screw guns, handy little 3.7 inch gun-howitzers of deadly accuracy, not mounted on mules as they were in Kipling's days, but drawn behind jeeps.

As the convoy nosed its way out of the town limits and on to the stretch of road leading to the mountains, we realized the journey would be a long one. Almost at once we met trucks coming back from Kohima, crammed full of men, fuller even than those we had seen two days before, with more men hanging on to any part of the vehicle that would take their weight. These men were not trained to fight, and they were not going to fight. Many of them had never fired their rifles since the few rounds they were given at their training depots, when they first put on uniform. They were storemen and clerks and accountants. In India these men are drawn, not from the fighting tribes who live in the deserts and jungles and mountains, but from those who live in the cities and have lost the war-like tradition of their forefathers. They were coming away in their hundreds, stampeding from the threat of death or capture.

I drove in a jeep at the head of the convoy with John and his batman, Heffernan. Heffernan was an institution. He could not remember when he had left his birthplace in Southern Ireland to find work in the Cumberland Hotel, but it was a long time ago. In the Army there was no promotion for Heffernan; he was the type of perpetual private, at least, so long as he stayed in the service. John was his god, who came first in all things. They are good friends, even now, though they have long since stopped serving together. N.C.O.s of all ranks fell for Heffernan's charm, and even the unbending R.S.M. numbered him among his friends.

As we moved forward more and more trucks came hurrying from Kohima, packed with frightened men, many of them deserters. There were others straggling along the road on foot, half trotting, half running, to escape from what lay behind them. They must have been on the road for two or three days. John soon saw the danger in the passing of these frightened men, even though none of them stopped to talk with us who were driving in to take their place. Panic needs no words to spread its evil influence; it passes silently through the air like

a giant shadow while the people run this way and that to escape its menace; and while they run, fear grips them until they are half insane. The C.O.'s concern was to hold his men within the shadow, yet keep them steady. He stopped the convoy and had word passed down that the frightened men had been allowed to leave Kohima in order to reduce the numbers dependent on the supply depots there. Some of our men believed him; others saw quite clearly where the trouble lay, but none complained.

The C.O. saw also the value of the weapons the refugees were carrying, so he had Douglas, with a patrol of men, stop each truck as it came speeding by and relieve the inmates of their automatics. They would be of more value in the hands of men who had the skill and spirit to use them.

Now and then an officer came driving past in a jeep or on a motor cycle and these we stopped, because we wanted to know what lay ahead of us. All told a story of disorganization and lack of spirit within the perimeter of Kohima town. Few of them had worthwhile news of the contact battle until one, the garrison intelligence officer, told us that the fighting was so far confined to the south edge of the town but that threats were developing from north and east. This was no more than young Smith had told us the night before, but we assumed that the threats were growing every hour. Now we wondered whether we would arrive too late. The C.O. had to decide whether to go on to Kohima and risk finding the place already surrounded, and so sacrifice the lives of hundreds of men in a useless move, or whether to take up a defensive position some little way from the town.

It is easy for a commander to take decisions when all the facts are laid clearly before him, but it is hard to decide when all you have is rumour and panic, half-known facts and muddle and confusion. So we tried to get more facts. At the twenty-third milestone, John stopped the convoy to see if there was anyone to help him. Two signallers tapped the telephone cable connecting Kohima with Dimapur and tried to gain contact first with one end and then with the other. Then we tried our own Brigade Headquarters, but from all places we were met with silence. As the signalmen disconnected their wires, so John made up his mind. He called his officers together and

told them that we would go on at all speed; there was no time to spare now.

The long line of the trucks moved forward again, this time with a renewed urgency. John had given his officers the briefest possible orders and even before they had had time to pass these on to their men, they all seemed aware of the decision taken and the need for alertness and speed. The feeling even spread to the drivers who squeezed every yard out of their overworked engines. And all the time John was urging the convoy on within himself. His theme now was speed, and every delay caused by the sharp corners and the traffic speeding recklessly in the opposite direction set him cursing. He tapped his message pad incessantly with the point of his pencil, a nervous gesture I had never seen before, and the only one I ever saw. But we were all nervous now, because the race was on, and the finish was going to be a close thing. We were runners who could not see, but only feel, the progress of our opponents.

Then, suddenly, after climbing up the last three steep miles, we were in Kohima. There was not a moment's delay; we all knew the ground and exactly where to go. The lorries drew up, nose to tail on the roadside, and the men spilled out and scrambled up the steep banks. They dashed through the undergrowth to the positions they had been given. A few of them, the lucky ones, found themselves in places where the trenches were already dug; but others, who went to new positions, had to start digging again. It was vital to get the men, the weapons and the wireless sets underground. The men took no equipment except the packs on their backs, their weapons and the ammunition in their pouches. The rest was left on the trucks to be collected later.

But no sooner had the last truck ground to a halt than the shelling started, intense and deadly shelling directed at the lorries. It was accurate, for the Japs had their guns on Workshop Ridge, overlooking the road where the convoy was halted. When the trucks backed round the sharp corner at T.C.P. 5 to get cover from a rise in the ground, the enemy opened up with small arms from the fort, which they had wrested from the Garrison troops only the day before. There was no question of dispersing the vehicles off the road with a sheer drop on one side and a sharp rise on the other. So they were left until dark,

but not before many had been reduced to blazing wrecks of twisted metal with the drivers dead inside the cabins. Only John Steady, responsible for the administration of 'A' Company, the first unit to arrive, and determined to support his men to the utmost, was able, by risking his life many times, to unload their kit, including the whole range of cooking equipment. His cookhouse became popular during the succeeding days.

Peter Franklin watched this holocaust from the top of a bank. He was responsible for unloading the stores and taking them where they were wanted. His was the decision to leave unloading until dark; there was nothing else he could do.

Meanwhile John and I once again walked round the defences, such as they were, for they no longer included the fort or the Naga village. We went first over Summer House Hill and down the path leading to the District Commissioner's bungalow. Near the bungalow, as we expected, we found Garrison Headquarters. They were deep dug in bunkers with trenches running between. There were no duckboards for the bunkers so they had lined the floors with bottles of rum and brandy from the supply depot; the bottles were full and we thought this a little strange. The headquarters had once been well inside the defences but now the Japs had taken the fort, it was out near the perimeter, which is no place for a headquarters to be. Nevertheless it stayed there because it was so well dug in and the staff felt safe in their dug-outs and their deep trenches. But the wireless sets were not dug in and this, too, seemed strange to us.

We walked back up the ridge on to Summer House Hill and the scene round there was one of chaos. There were troops scattered everywhere in no sort of order. There were some fighting troops of the Assam Regiment and Rifles, and fine troops they were, but they were at the point of exhaustion. The riflemen had fought back step by step before the Japanese onslaught from forward of the Chindwin; across massive mountains and through a wilderness of jungle. They needed rest before fighting again. In worse condition were the fifteen hundred Indian non-combatant troops who still remained. There were few officers to control them and even they were out of their element, for the coming of war into this peaceful place had found them unprepared. Paper and ink, figures and forms,

bundles and bales were their weapons. When shot and shell came suddenly upon them, they were at a loss, and their men were lost too. They were all scattered among the bushes, lying or squatting about and moving only when the shells came near them, to some place where they thought they might escape. They did not even know that the surest defence against shell fire was to dig a deep hole and crawl into it, or at least, if they knew, they had not the heart to dig.

There was a State Force regiment which had taken possession of the very summit of the hill and formed a circle round it, with all their weapons pointing outwards so that the hill from below looked like a worm's-eye view of a hedgehog. They fired their rifles into the air from time to time to keep up their spirits. As soon as John saw them he told me to take their automatics away and put them into the hands of men who knew how to use them.

As we walked a little way down I.G.H. Spur, round the flank of Summer House Hill and down south over Kuki Picquet, across the F.S.D. Feature and on to the D.I.S. Spur the story was the same; men without leadership, guided only by fear; men without spirit; men without hope. They were to be a greater problem, even, than our enemy for though, in time, we were able to organize them, never did we release them from fear. Throughout the battle we lived and fought among them.

The defences they had dug on the perimeter were quite inadequate. They were deep shelters, with thick head cover, large enough to hold a dozen men each, but only one weapon could be fired through the tiny slit between the roof and the ground, so that only one man in every twelve could fight off the enemy. These shelters were particularly badly designed down by the D.C.'s bungalow and on D.I.S. Spur, where Bobby Shaw took over the position from an officer of the Detailed Issue Section. The officer told him, "My men are in great heart, they fired five thousand rounds last night." Bobby looked round for the victims of this devastating onslaught, but there was not a single dead Japanese to be seen.

As we walked round we looked for water and found little, only one pipeline leading from over the hills where the Japs were swarming. We knew it would soon be cut. There were canvas tanks in the hospital and the supply depot, but no effort

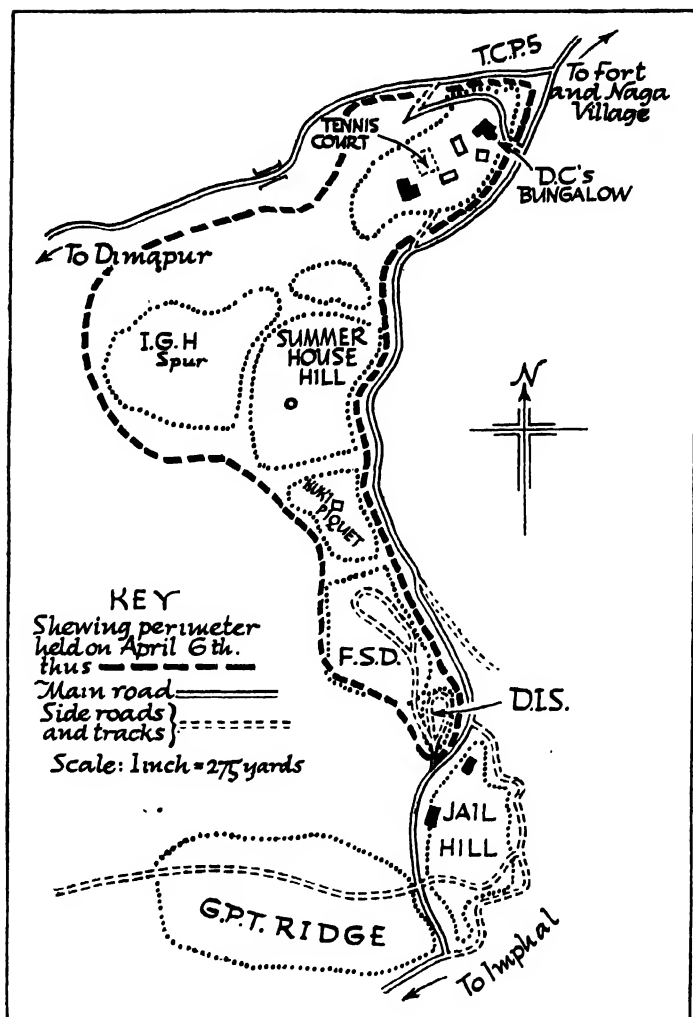
had been made to fill them, or to sink them into the ground as a safeguard against shelling. We discovered later that the garrison engineer officer—his name was Lander—had been unable to take these precautions due to uncertainty as to where the final battle dispositions would be taken up in the town. Once clear orders had been given this gallant officer showed infinite resource and incredible courage in making best use of the limited water supplies available and, indeed, in improving our lot in any way he could.

We looked, also, at the arrangements for the wounded and found them utterly inefficient. There were five small scattered aid posts, some of them with medical stores and some with none. All were full of wounded lying in the open. Someone would have to bring the stores and the broken bodies together, but at the moment we had no one to do it. Our field ambulance section was commanded by a Havildar, who was not trained to cope with a situation of this sort. Perhaps something would turn up.

We looked for guns, because the infantry need guns in defence; they alone can break up the enemy attacks before they close; they alone can hold the enemy off. Without them the infantry are engaged in constant hand-to-hand fighting, with the enemy never more than a few yards away, and always in greater numbers. Without guns there is no respite. But we found only one, a 25-pounder in the open garden of the D.C.'s bungalow. As one would expect, it had been knocked out after firing its first round. Our own two screw guns we put in the only place from which they could fire over the tree tops and we were soon to find that they too were useless, for this position was in full view of the Japs' observation posts.

As we walked we measured the area which was left for us to defend. Across the top of the triangle it measured seven hundred yards, down the west side nine hundred and up the east side, eleven hundred; in it were crowded two thousand five hundred troops, less than one-third of them fit to fight. The measurements did not include Jail Hill. Nobody knew what was happening up there; tomorrow we would have to find out.

The ground we were on was not of our choosing; it was all the enemy had left for us, for they had taken the features all round, except the one road leading out to Dimapur. Our



orders were to hold Kohima, so we did not need the road, except to move out non-combatants and wounded and this we could do only at night because of the Japanese guns. It has ever since been a constant source of wonder to us why we were allowed to come up the road immune. We could only assume that the Japs were so surprised to see anyone come into the

town that by the time they had recovered from their initial shock, we were in.

The whole area was covered with tall, strong trees. Among them the undergrowth grew thin, much thinner than in the jungles of the Arakan, and consisted mostly of rhododendron bushes and small shrubs; tracks and footpaths ran in all directions through the bushes. We could see only forty or fifty yards through the trees in the daytime and at night we could see nothing, not even when the stars and the moon were shining together. The sky was shut out by the thick canopy a hundred feet above our heads, so that the days were dull and the nights pitch. But it was hot in there when the sun was shining, and sticky; though the nights were bitter cold, for we were at five thousand feet.

There were only two relieving features, food and ammunition. There was plenty of both in the F.S.D., stored there for the use of our armies fighting further up the line towards Imphal and Tiddim, but of no use to them now, for there was no way of moving it there. There was no airfield at Kohima; there was no railway passing through; the only road had been cut by the enemy.

After exploring every detail of the position we went back to our own command post, some way down the ridge between Summer House Hill and the D.C.'s bungalow. It was from here that the battle was to be fought and as soon as we reached it, the C.O. stripped off his jacket and set to with pick and shovel. A command post is an important place; it has to be well dug and it must be deep and wide enough to allow three or four people to move about in it. It must have head cover against shell fire and holes nearby for the wireless sets, for they too must be dug in deep. When men are killed, others replace them, or those who are left do the work of two, but there were few spares for our wireless sets so that they could not be replaced. Without them we would become an orderless collection of individuals, of no use in modern war. We laid line out to our company posts, but so heavy was the shelling in the days to come that it was seldom in use in spite of constant effort by our signallers to mend the breaks. So the C.O. dug shoulder to shoulder with Sergeant Strange and Private Heffernan and Signalman Price to make his command post deep and safe.

As darkness fell the digging went on, not only at head-

quarters but out in the forests too. We could hear the clinking of picks and the scraping of shovels between bursts of shell fire which came and went all the time. And we could hear men cursing because they were tired, but sweating all the same in spite of the evening cold, sweating with labour.

At ten o'clock the Brigadier came up on the wireless and asked to speak to John. I called him over and heard him give his report: "All quiet except for occasional shelling. Main threat from south, but skin not yet punctured. Body threatened by pin-pricks on all sides except right shoulder. Am trying to evacuate wounded and non-combatants tomorrow. That's all—off." The wireless crackled for a short while until the signaller switched it off to save the batteries. Silence closed down, for by now even the digging had stopped and the exhausted men were trying to sleep, those, that is, who were not on watch. But all round us in the silent darkness was movement. We could neither hear nor see, but we could feel them moving out there in the jungle, filtering round, sections, companies, battalions, round to the north and to the south and slowly closing the ring.

5

Besieged

THE cold woke Harman and his friend Mathews before it was yet light. An icy mist was floating in the trees; not the light mist of an English summer morning, but a wet and heavy blanket of fog. The two men were in a slit trench where they had spent the night. A slit trench may be safe, but it is a poor place to sleep because there is no room to lie down and stretch out. Instead, you sit at one end, with another man opposite you and your legs drawn up. You cannot spread the weight of your body evenly over your whole back because to do so you must sit upright and your head will come over the top of the trench. It is unwise to stick your neck out when shells are falling. There are stones sticking into your back and all night you shift restlessly, trying to avoid them. But at last, because you are exhausted, your head drops forward on to your chest and you doze off until the cold wakes you.

Jim Mathews looked over at his friend and after a while he knew that dawn had broken somewhere out there beyond the mist, because he could just see the corporal's face. He said, "Christ, John, it's — cold up 'ere. Wish we could 'ave got them blankets off the trucks. P'raps old Shaw'll let us go and get 'em later on."

Harman said, "By what I saw of the trucks when we left them, there won't be any blankets. I guess we've got to make do with what we've got." What they had was one blanket each. Their uniforms, thin drill tunics and trousers, were not made to withstand cold. So they sat and shivered, knowing full well that they would shiver again tonight and tomorrow night and for God knows how many nights after that. After a while Harman said, "Well, I guess it's stand to. I'd better get the boys out," and he disappeared into the mist.

Jim shook out his blanket, folded it neatly and placed it on the front edge of the slit trench. He picked up his Bren gun, wiped it over with a piece of cloth and placed it carefully on top of the blanket with the sights upright, so that it was ready to fire. He knelt behind it and squinted through the sights. He guessed he could see about fifteen yards into the mist, but he knew where he had to fire, if the time came, for Harman's section was on the very end of the D.I.S. Spur and the automatics had to fire along the road running between them and Jail Hill. He had put two sticks in the ground the day before to show him the line of fire; today, he thought, he would build some sort of framework in which to hold his gun. He ought really to have done so yesterday, but he had been too busy digging.

Harman came back and knelt in the trench and almost immediately Bobby and Dodo appeared through the mist. With them was a signaller, carrying a small wireless set on his back. Bobby asked Harman how the night had passed and Harman told him that all his section reported that they had heard and seen nothing; then he added, "But they're out there, sir. You can feel them moving around. I don't believe they're on that Jail Hill—I'm sure some of our blokes are there, but God knows who they are."

Bobby knew who they were, Gurkha reinforcements hastily thrown in only a few days before. They had been filtering back throughout the night and Bobby had collected fifty or so round his own headquarters. He tried to make them return to their posts, but not knowing their language, nor being fully aware of the situation on Jail Hill, although it was only thirty yards across from his forward section, his efforts were vain. At length one of their officers arrived to say that he had been trying to hold them firm at pistol-point, but had failed. Bobby realized that the position on the hill must be critical indeed for Gurkha soldiers to abandon their posts against orders. He had never heard of such a case before and he never would again.

He discussed this with Harman, then Mathews joined the conversation. "Excuse me, sir, but 'ow long are we 'ere? Bloody daft I calls it, all this shiftin' about and John 'ere—I mean the Corporal, sir—don't know any more than me."

Bobby said, "No more do I, but we'll find out soon enough. My guess is that the Japs are going to try to capture this place

and there's only us to stop them. So we'll stay here until they go." But he thought, 'I'm just kidding them, jockeying them along, and it's no bloody good. You can't lead men if you don't tell them where they're going.'

He started moving off, but before they went, Dodo handed the men their mepacrine tablets; he watched them put the tablets in their mouths and swallow.

No sooner had they left than the firing started, out there in front, perhaps thirty or a hundred or two hundred yards away, they had no way of knowing, for the mist and the trees muffled the noise. But there was an attack coming in somewhere; the men knew it and were at once alert. Harman climbed out of the safety of his slit trench and walked slowly round his section. He said the same to each pair of men, "This is it, lads, and mind you, no bloody shooting till I give the order. It's no damn good brassing off into the mist unless you can see something to shoot at." When he came back to his trench he said to Jim, "I said they're not to fire till they see something to shoot at. What do you think?" And Jim said, "It's O.K. by me and anyway, you're the boss around here, Corp. What you say goes." Harman was again surprised that the men had accepted him as their leader.

When Bobby heard the firing he called up headquarters and asked the C.O. what it was all about. The C.O. said he did not know and told Bobby to find out. He turned to Dodo and said, "Get hold of Harman's lot and take them over to Jail Hill. Bring back a report of the exact position."

Dodo said, "Right ho, Bobby," and walked slowly over to the section. He sat down and looked at the map which he kept folded in his pocket. After taking a compass bearing and making a note of it on the top right-hand corner of the map, he thought for a few moments before telling Harman to collect his section. The men set out in single file at intervals of two yards, with Watts leading and Harman behind him. They clambered down the bank, on to the wide road, and disappeared into the mist towards the noise of the firing.

The command post was awake by now and the five of us in it seemed a crowd; it was six feet square and five feet deep. Along one side the earth had been dug so as to make a seat for visitors. Opposite were two alcoves, a wireless set in each, one in contact with Brigade Headquarters and the other with the

company commanders. Each was constantly manned by a signaller or an officer. Ventilation came through a shaft built in the third side, which also served as a look-out; on the fourth side was the exit, with three steps leading into the trees above. There was just room on the floor for three men to sleep; the C.O., Douglas and Price, the signaller. The rest of us slept in slit trenches nearby. The post was not much of a place to live in, but we were proud of the roof; it was fully timbered and two feet of earth rested on the timber. The C.O. and Private Heffernan had made a good job of the roof. There was a hurricane lamp hanging from it.

John had spent most of the night awake, and after two hours' sleep he woke again, alert and fresh. Sleep meant little to him; during all the time that I had known him, I had never seen him tired. After folding his blanket and placing it in one corner, he took a small mirror out of his pocket and rested it on the earth seat. He took off his tunic, tipped a little cold water into his mug from his water bottle and knelt down to shave. He looked small and fragile, kneeling in the half light of the hurricane lamp. There was not an ounce of spare flesh on his slight frame, but we had already found out that his body was wiry and full of strength. He shaved thoroughly and it was well that he did so, for it was his last shave for nearly three weeks.

I did not wake fresh. I had spent most of the night dozing near the wireless set and when at last I came to, I had a headache and my mouth was dry. The dug-out was cold, but airless, and the smoke from Douglas's cigarettes hung about in the air, stale-smelling. I took a swig of water from my bottle, but it tasted foul and I spat it on to the floor. I poured water over my hands and rubbed my face hard all over, but this, too, had little effect. Perhaps I would feel better after a cup of tea and breakfast. When the sound of firing filtered into the dug-out I put on the earphones and waited for the call which I knew must come. Then I heard Bobby's voice—"Hullo Able three. Firing coming from one hundred yards to my south. Request report latest situation on Jail Hill. . . ." I handed him over to John and heard him tell Bobby to go and find out. He took off the earphones and sat on the ground staring at his map. He said, "Garrison, tell me that there are some of our chaps on Jail Hill, but don't know who they are. It sounds as if the Japs

are now driving them off. Get Donald tied up in case we have to counter-attack." Jail Hill was important because, if the Japs took it they could overlook all our positions on D.I.S. and F.S.D.

Heffernan came in carrying five mugs of tea. He handed one to the C.O. and put the others down so that we could help ourselves. He said, "Top o' the morning to ye, sirs, there's a nice Irish mist in the trees and the sun is shinin' above. Sure an' it'll be a lovely day by nine o'clock."

Heffernan must have picked up his early morning gambits at the Cumberland, but we were in no mood for badinage. John thanked him for the tea and asked him politely to remove himself. We heard his voice as he left, unabashed, speaking to Sergeant Strange, "Sure an' there's three hungry officers down there Sergeant, you'd rather get a move on with their breakfast, bejasus!"

Sergeant Strange was a gentleman's gentleman, whichever way you looked at him, in uniform or out. He had a number of gentlemen to look after now, but whenever we were tired and lonely, and the world around us seemed crazy and almost too dangerous to live in, there was Sergeant Strange with a cup of tea and his perfect English manner, and at once we felt sane again. He brought breakfast into the dug-out, three mess tins on a tray—God knows where he had got it from—and offered if first to John, then to Douglas and then to me. The breakfast was good; in one half of the mess tin, porridge, and in the other, two sausages and a thin strip of bacon, more fat than lean. Loose on the tray was a pile of biscuits from which we could help ourselves. We ate both courses with the same spoon to save washing up.

No sooner had we finished than Dodo stumbled cheerfully into the dug-out, filling it up with his great round body. He had come back from his patrol and Bobby had sent him up to report on Jail Hill. He said, "The whole place is swarming with Japs, one behind every bush. Harman bayoneted a couple but I didn't want to start any shooting for fear we didn't get back. There seems to be a few of our chaps still holding out on top, but I couldn't make contact with them as they're completely surrounded."

John asked him, "What do you think about the chances of counter-attack?"

Dodo thought, then answered, "There's just a chance while a few of our blokes are still up there, but there are an awful lot of Japs and you may run into trouble. It's an important place and I would say it was worth the risk." He did not know how great the risk was; only John and Douglas and I knew that, and John had to make the decision, whether to take it or not. We had so few fighting men to defend that small area and protect the wounded and the non-combatants; we could ill afford to have them wasted away in attack. But John decided to try it and called up Donald to tell him to move off. He said he would lay on what fire support he could and sent for the mortar sergeant, King, and for the gunner.

Sergeant King lived for his mortars. He had been an instructor at some school before joining us and at first the battle-worn men disliked his ways. He was one for the book, which he knew by heart, but the book meant nothing to them. The mortar men soon learnt the book under him and saw the mortars become better weapons in their hands as a result. Then they started killing Japs with the mortars and saw their sergeant in action, cool and fearless. One day, after a fierce action in the Arakan, when the mortars had fired round after round to support a company on to its objective, the Japs found them and sent back their answer with deadly accurate artillery fire. While the shells were falling all round, Sergeant King stood up in the open and shouted, "Lesson four. Maintenance after firing. At the first opportunity the barrel should be thoroughly cleaned as follows: if hot water is available, wash out the barrel. Well, hot water isn't available. Failing this, a wet sand bag wrapped round the head of the cleaning rod will be used to scour the barrel. Right, we've got the sandbags, but no water, so piddle in them till they're thoroughly wet." The men peed into the sandbags and cleaned the barrels while the sergeant walked round seeing that they did so according to the drill laid down. Ten minutes later the mortars were in action again, and Sergeant King had passed his final test.

The gunner's name was Yeo. He was a regular officer who knew all about guns and particularly the screw gun, the 3.7 inch howitzer which could go anywhere, either broken down into mule loads or towed behind a jeep. He had fired the screw gun against Pathans in the Waziristan mountains, on training in the Punjab plains and against the Japs in the

Arakan. Now he hoped to fire them against the Japs in Kohima, but as yet he had no guns, for the two which he brought into the bastion with his giant Sikh gunners had already been knocked out by counter-bombardment fire. Throughout the night we had heard him in his own dug-out next to ours, trying to make contact with the rest of his regiment somewhere on the road, but he had failed and he came in now only to report his failure and hurry back to his wireless set. Yeo spilled over with confidence and we had no doubt that he would get through.

So the support of Donald's counter-attack was left to Sergeant King, with his six mortars, and even these he could not place together in a single battery, as he would have liked, because the perimeter was so small. He had to scatter them in pairs to be sure that he could bring down fire on all fronts. He explained this layout to the C.O. and defined how he could best support the attack. He could do this only by moving the mortars from their dug-in positions into the open, both the mortars and the ammunition. He said he would have them ready in fifteen minutes.

Then Donald was on the set, "Hullo Able Four. On start line. Are Able Five ready? Over."

"Hullo Able Four, Able Five ready in figures one five minutes. You will cross start line at zero nine hundred hours. Off."

At nine o'clock his voice came through again, "Hullo, Able Four—crossing start line now. Off."

We in the command post followed the battle from Donald's reports—"Hullo Able Four. Am crossing road. Fire coming from left flank."

"Able Four. Am half way up Jail Hill. Japs everywhere. At least ten casualties. Off."

"Able Four. No sign of our own troops on Jail Hill. Am being attacked by superior numbers. Off."

"Hullo Able Four. Five more casualties. Am taking up defensive position. Off."

"Able Four. Jap numbers increasing. Dangerous threat to right flank. Am afraid they will soon be behind me. Able Three giving good support but unable engage Japs on right flank. Off."

This time John answered him, "Hullo, Able Four, withdraw at once through Able Three. Off." He saw the risk now;

the price he would have to pay for the recapture of Jail Hill was too high. He had waited until the last minute before calling off the attack because he was one who liked to hit hard all the time. Sitting back and taking it was no part of his creed.

We went down to D.I.S. so that John could see for himself what was happening, but there was little to see because, although the mist had now risen off the hill tops, the trees blocked the view. We crouched in a small ditch, waiting for 'D' Company to come back. And they came, fighting all the way, until, as they ran across the road, the men all round us started firing at the Japs who were following up. The mortars opened up again and the Japs soon reckoned they had had enough and faded away into the jungle. As the men passed through the forest on D.I.S. Hill they cracked jokes with the soldiers in the trenches. I heard one of them say, "Sorry you weren't with us, Corp, thought you was one of us." Harman grinned, but made no reply, although he had been out there already this morning and had killed two Japanese soldiers on the end of his bayonet.

The C.O. said, "Get hold of Donald and tell him to take up new positions on F.S.D." I did so, and we then walked back to the command post. On the way over Kuki Picquet we saw an officer sitting in a small hole in the ground. John stopped and said, "Who the hell are you?"

The man replied, "I'm from the stores depot and I've got to get out of here quick. My men have all gone, the rotten bastards, and I'm no good. You must let me out—I've got to get back to Calcutta."

John said, "The road is still open; you can walk out that way any time you like, but no one's going with you. Our job and yours is to hold this place for as long as we're told."

What little life was left in the officer drained out of his eyes; fear took its place. He said, "I can't do it; it's too dangerous. I can't go down there alone, the Japs'd get me."

John said, "And so they will, but I can find a job for you here. You can't do it sitting in that hole." The officer said nothing, nor did he move, so we left him where he was and walked away. John asked, "What the hell do you do with a bloke like that?"

I said, "I should think he's best left where he is, where no one can see him."

John answered, "Yes, but the story will be all round the men before nightfall. His sort of spirit spreads." So we called him 'the man in the hole' and we laughed whenever his name was mentioned. The joke was weak, but it did the trick.

Peter Franklin was waiting for us in the command post, sitting on the ground in one corner, sucking his pipe. There was no tobacco in it. Like Dodo's, his great body filled the place, for he was tall and round; his jovial face shone brightly in the lamp light. John asked what he had been doing and, speaking deliberately, he said, "Well, I got some of the transport away last night, with Bryn in charge, but a lot of it had been smashed up. Ten of the trucks were completely burnt out. We removed quite a lot of the kit, but I'm afraid there were very few blankets or greatcoats. We dumped it on the roadside and then I had to round up the drivers, the devil of a job. They were scattered all over the place, settled on the nearest piece of ground they thought safe. However, I found a Jemadar who could understand a bit of English and when he explained to one or two of them that we wanted them to drive the trucks back to Dimapur, they came out of hiding pretty quickly. Even so, both Bryn and the Q.M. had to act as drivers to get them away. We pushed the damaged trucks over the khudside; I couldn't see any use in leaving them on the road. By this time it was daylight and we started bringing the stacked stores into the company areas. This was pretty hectic, because we were under fire from snipers and a certain amount of shelling.

"I then sorted out the supplies and I must say, there's one good thing about this place—bags of food about. I set a lot of Indians on to shifting it out of the F.S.D. into company areas. The only thing I couldn't find was milk, until I started looking round the trenches the State Force troops have dug on Summer House Hill. I found them all lined with tins of milk, so I took them away and dished them out. I understand those fellows live on milk when they get the chance. Well, they're not having the chance at our expense.

"Water's going to be the hell of a problem. The pipeline is still running, but I can't see it lasting much longer; the Japs are bound to cut it. There's a little trickle down by the D.C.'s bungalow, but when I was having a look at it, I heard a rustle in the bushes and discovered the Japs were only thirty yards away. I guess we'll have to use that at night. I haven't been

able to find anything else yet, but I have some chaps looking round.

"The worst thing I found was the medical bandobast, which is ghastly. The wounded are all lying about in the open in scattered aid posts, without enough water or blankets or proper attention. I haven't had time yet to start sorting them out, but there are some men digging trenches for them. A lot of them can walk and there's no doubt about it, we must get them out. The best plan would be to take them down the road tonight, as soon after dark as possible.

"By the way, I bumped into a strong patrol of the 4/7 Rajputs just now. Apparently they had a bad time coming up the road, mostly from snipers, but they managed to get in. I can't find any record in the log telling you they were coming, but the officer says he's come up to make contact with us. Apparently he has to return to his battalion as soon as he can. I've told him it's madness to leave before dark, so I should think the best thing is to get them to escort the wounded out tonight."

The C.O. said, "Yes, but not tonight. You'll have to take them out yourself and you've a long way to go yet with organizing the rest of the wounded. Aim to start after dark tomorrow. We'll hang on to the Rajputs till then whatever Brigade say." Peter sucked his pipe and wondered what the chances were of getting through.

He was soon to know, for at that moment we heard Heffernan arguing with an officer outside the post. Heffernan, in addition to his other duties, was a self-constituted bodyguard to the C.O.; as such, he considered he should handle his master's visitors. When the C.O. was in conference only the brave entered the command post. This time it was young Faulkner who was trying to come in. I put out my head and told Heffernan to let him by, only just in time to prevent the conversation becoming abusive.

Six months before Faulkner had been at public school. Now he had just returned from patrolling the deep valley and dense jungles lying between us and Bare Ridge, to the west. He reached the top of the ridge and turned north towards the road. Forty yards from the road he saw a strong road block, just below Picquet Hill. He stayed there for two hours, with his men crouching silent behind him as he watched the Japs

digging strong positions on each side of the road. So now the ring was closed—there was no way out except, perhaps, through the jungle, at night. The boy brought this vital news straight to his C.O. When he had finished John said, "Who sent you on patrol?"

He answered, "Major Kenyon, sir."

John told him, "When your company commander sends you on patrol, you report back to him. Please do so in future."

The boy stammered, "Yes, sir, I'm sorry, sir," and walked out. The C.O. followed him and they spoke together for a while outside.

I looked at Peter and he was thinking even harder now. The C.O. came back and asked him, "What do you think, Peter? Can you make it through the jungle?"

Peter said, "I've no idea, but I'll have to try. If I follow the ridges I should be able to bring them out at the forty-second mile, provided the Japs haven't thought of the same idea first. But we must take out what we can; we've far too much to look after already."

The C.O. ordered, "All right—make it tomorrow." Peter clambered to his feet and disappeared through the exit.

The day was quiet now. It was these moments of quiet that we dreaded most because it was then that we could feel the enemy moving all round us, though we could not see him. We felt him strengthening his positions, leaning a little more heavily on this front, then on that; preparing for one attack here and another there. And though we couldn't see him, nor knew exactly where he was, we were sure that the attacks were coming, and coming soon. During these periods patrols of tired men went out to try and find him, but all came back with uncertain stories of Japs everywhere; none could estimate the numbers. In the thick country it was impossible to overlook any one position and count enemy heads; the men could only guess from the noise of their chatter and their movements how many men were beyond that clump of bushes or this group of trees. No patrol was allowed to fight for information, for we could not afford to lose men on patrol. Every man counted on the perimeter of defence.

The silence was broken at dusk by the evening hate. This became a daily event; an hour or two of constant shelling from guns which were now all round us; guns placed on ground

higher than ours from which the Japanese gunners and observers could mark down our every movement. At first the trees gave us cover, but later even these were stripped bare, so that we felt naked, and exposed. As the shells and bombs fell among us, we wondered if this was a prelude to attack.

Jitter Tactics

It was, and Bobby bore the brunt. He was squatting in a slit trench with one of his men beside him. It was curious how, as the unit grew up, we found ourselves allocating the men to their leaders—Bobby's men, Tommy's men. We did this because, in a unit such as ours, we looked on the men as part of that branch of the family, for we were not professional soldiers, but butchers and bookies, solicitors and students, lawyers and labourers, who had worked and lived together in Kentish towns and villages. The men looked at it that way too, for there are few men who do not need a home or family to hold on to. When both home and family are eight thousand miles away, they will substitute something for them, and the nearest substitute is Bobby or Tommy, or whoever may be leading them. So the leaders, beside asking them to share danger and hardship, become mother and father to the men and provide them with a home, even though it is only a hole in the ground on a dark night, in the jungle on top of a great mountain.

The man at Bobby's side was Scudder, a private in Harman's section. The section had been lent to Bobby by Donald to block a hole in the perimeter which he could not fill himself, but even so, for the moment, Harman and Mathews and Scudder and the rest of them were Bobby's men. They were both staring out into the darkness, with a signaller, Hall, close behind. Scudder was saying, "Funny how quiet it is. Them guns seem so far away." Bobby listened out into the pool of silence all round them and wondered why the insects had not started their evening chorus. The silence was made more intense by the contrasting noise of shells falling behind them. Though they stared until their eyes smarted, they could not see even as far as the road which ran across their front twenty

yards away, for the tree tops shut out the starlight. Bobby wished for the moon to rise, so that they could see the road, a silver pathway through the black night. With the moonlight on the road the Japs, as they crossed it, would show up as dark shadows, and they had to cross it to reach him. The road was dug deep into the hill side and Bobby's plan was to kill the enemy as they were crossing it and scrambling up the steep banks on which he had placed his men. So Major Shaw and Privates Scudder and Hall waited for the moon to rise, and as they waited they shivered in the cold.

Suddenly an urgent voice came through the darkness, "Hey! Johnny, let me through, let me through, the Japs are after me; they're going to get me." This was an old trick—the Japs had tried it in the Arakan—but even so, Bobby prayed that none of his men would shout an answer. Then came other voices, from different directions, all shouting the same theme. "Let me through, let me through," but there was no answer. After the voices a single shot rang out from above them, from the top of one of the giant trees. Then came another and another, again from different directions with a long pause between each shot. This, too, was an old trick and one which they had fallen for when they were fresh to the jungle. The nervous men had fired back, blazing away with their weapons at a danger they could not see, while the flashes from their muzzles showed the Japs where they were. Now they had become used to the trick and there was no answering fire, and Bobby was glad.

The sniping continued for some time, some of it coming even from behind them. This was the hardest to bear, because they felt that somehow the Jap must have found a gap in the defences and walked through it; and where one Jap had walked, others could go. They sensed that perhaps the enemy were gathering in numbers behind them and would be waiting if they had to fall back before the frontal onslaught. As time went by, the sensation grew stronger. It was a test of nerves and only if they held steady would the enemy fail to locate their positions. Bobby's men held steady.

They held steady until they heard the scuffling in the road and knew that the attack was launched. The Japs came as silently as they could; they wore gym shoes and any part of their equipment that might clink in the darkness was muffled

with cloth or removed. But even with the sound of the shells falling behind them, the men could hear the Japs scrambling up the bank and the loosened stones falling back on to the hard surface of the road. There was no doubt that they were attacking in large numbers. Bobby took the microphone from his signaller and called up Sergeant King to tell him that the attack was coming in. A minute later the mortars opened fire and rained bombs on to Jail Hill. This was the signal for Bobby's men to fire, their weapons laid on fixed lines down the road. The fire-plan had been thought out very carefully, so that the Japs had to cross a curtain of steel before they could reach Bobby's forward positions. With one shout he brought down this curtain. The Brens and machine guns clattered and the riflemen showered grenade after grenade on to the road.

For once the Japs were quiet, instead of yelling and screaming and blowing bugles as was their custom. It was a good custom because when there was noise you could tell where they were, but in the Stygian darkness it was the silent enemy whom you feared most. Suddenly they passed through the steel curtain and were up on the bank. One of them appeared at the end of Scudder's rifle and he shot him dead. Then came another, and another, so that Scudder was busy with his rifle, and Bobby with his Tommy gun, and Hall left his wireless set to join the fray. All along the top of the bank was a crowd of seething, cursing, sweating men in close combat, killing, maiming, wounding. Meanwhile the mortars fired. Then the defenders slowly became aware that there were fewer of the enemy up against them, until there was only one here who had been left behind, or another there, more determined than his comrades. These were dealt with quite easily, one by one. Then Bobby wiped the sweat from his face and took the microphone again and told King to stop firing because the attackers were gone. Mortar bombs were valuable; they might be needed to stave off the next attack, or the one after that, or the one after that. Soon there was silence in the darkness, except for the groans of the wounded and the rustling of the bushes as the last defeated Jap made his way back through the jungle to where he had come from.

But relief was short lived. Half an hour later they attacked again, with fresh men, and this time they boosted their courage with the shouting and the yelling and the bugle blowing. They

came in even larger numbers, exerting intense pressure on Bobby's front. It needed all the strength of the men he had to hold them off. Soon he realized that the sounds of battle over to his left were moving round behind him and that the enemy were making ground over there. He knew that the platoon holding that part of his line was weak in numbers; he had always been afraid that the Japs might find this weakness and concentrate their attacks against it. He felt his way through the darkness to where the din was coming from. He had to find out what was wrong and try to do something to put it right, though there was little he could do, for all his men were engaged on their own fronts. As he moved from tree to tree he heard excited comments from the soldiers.

"Cor, didn't 'arf drag the daylight's out o' that f——!"

"'Ow many o' these bastards are there? There's fahsands on 'em."

"'Ere, George, change me barrel, quick, it's —— nigh meltin'."

"Shut up you ——s. Keep yer bloody mouths shut."

"Dusty's 'ad it, Sarge, I'll 'ave to mind this lot on me own."

"Stretcher bearer—'er."

He wondered how many had 'ad it' besides Dusty and who needed the stretcher. He would not know until morning.

When he came near to the area of the break through, he stopped, wondering which way to go, when a man bumped into him. He said quickly, "Who's that?" and the reply came, "Ingles." It was the platoon commander. Bobby asked him what the form was and the young man whispered, "I'm afraid they're through. They've got into the F.S.D."

Bobby answered, "It can't be helped. Keep your men where they are, and give me a couple."

The platoon commander disappeared and returned in a moment with two privates whom Bobby led forward towards the F.S.D. He saw the danger of the Japs filtering into the depot buildings, for there they would be between his own company and Donald's, able to fire into either position from close range; it would then be impossible for him to hold out on D.I.S. Spur if attacked from both directions. In any case, there would be no way to get food and ammunition once the supplies in his own area had run out, because they all came down F.S.D. Ridge. He had to find out the extent of the infiltration,

The supply depot was a collection of bashas, with brick walls four feet high and atap or tin roofs supported on bamboo frames. He knew the area well, and he knew each basha inside out, because he had explored them thoroughly in case he might use them himself. As soon as he came near the buildings he heard the Japs inside, talking and moving about. He was amazed at their casualness, even in the midst of their enemies; he thought it was a mixture of too much courage and too little training. He was not content with knowing they were there; he had to get some idea of their strength. He decided to go into one of the empty bashas and listen, hoping to estimate their strength from the sounds in the bashas all round. He stepped quickly into a doorway, leaving the two men outside. He flashed on his torch and at once it was shot out of his hand. The bullet scorched his skin; he could feel the blood trickling over his fingers and he cursed himself for a fool. He should have smelt the place out before showing a light, for in moments like this you need to use all your senses, not only your ears and eyes, and you could always smell a Jap, particularly when he was sweating, as this one was. He brought up his Tommy gun and fired a long burst in the direction from which the shot had come. He crouched inside the doorway until the shattering din of the firing left the hut and freed his eardrums. Then the smell of cordite was the only smell and there was no sound, but somehow he knew that there were more of them in there and decided to move out.

Before he left he waited by the doorway, listening, trying to assess the numbers of enemy from the sounds in the huts around. So intent was he on the job in hand that he was only half aware of the pain in his fingers and the sound of others breathing inside his hut. As he stepped out, quickly, a voice came out of the darkness, "Are you all right, sir?" He answered, "Yes," and led the way back to his own command post.

He called the C.O. on the wireless and told him what had happened. John said there was nothing more he could do that night except hang on; they would have to sort it out in the morning. He told Hall to shine a torch on his damaged hand in the shelter of the dug-out and Hall wiped the blood away and bandaged it carefully.

John Young

JOHN took the news with his usual calm, although the danger was immediately apparent to him. After telling Bobby to stay where he was, he talked to John Winstanley with his 'B' Company on Kuki Picquet and told him not to start any shooting that night for fear of firing into Bobby's men further down the ridge. He then talked to Donald and told him to prepare a counter-attack against the F.S.D. at dawn. The three officers were all listening on the command net so all knew what the others had been told to do.

No sooner had John finished speaking than a figure came down from the darkness into the lamplight, a figure we least expected; it belonged to John Young. The lamplight at once caught his hair, very fair, and his pale aquiline features. It was hard to believe that he was in medicine for he had an artistic presence and had, in fact, studied art in Vienna before becoming a doctor. But as either artist or doctor he seemed to have missed his true profession for he had a predilection for war, as a romantic warrior. He played polo well and we made the old joke that he knew more about horses than the human body; but of two things we were certain—he knew how to run a field ambulance and he was the man of the moment. We had last seen him three miles outside Dimapur, setting up an Advance Dressing Station, and we thought we had said good-bye to him when we took one of his sections away to bring it to Kohima. But he was not to be left out of the battle, so he walked in alone, over the mountains.

The doctor wore a lieutenant-colonel's rank on his shoulder, but rank meant little to him. He was completely at ease with everyone, whether a sepoy, private or general. Since the war had started, in his role as doctor his sole aim in life had been

to pass wounded men into comfort and skilful hands with the utmost speed. As a hobby he studied tactics and was never at a loss for advice on how to meet a tactical situation.

He was in the Indian Medical Service and could speak Urdu; for this reason alone we wanted him. Many of the wounded were Indians and those Indians who were not wounded were most of them frightened men; we needed someone with courage and personality who could talk to them and make them work. John Young had both.

The C.O. was not emotional, but he wept with joy as he greeted his friend. He asked him how he had come in and Young said, "Well, I reckoned the tactical situation up here was getting a bit tricky so I thought I'd come and give you a little advice on how to handle it. Now, so far as I can make out, the Japs have closed the ring round Kohima and are particularly strong on the south side, that is, on Jail Hill. . . ."

John Laverty interrupted him, "The tactical situation is not half as bad as your side of the party. The medical set-up is shocking and poor old Peter is struggling with it as best he can; you'd better get together with him and sort it out."

The doctor looked abashed, but said, "Right ho! Lead me to him."

The C.O. said, "You haven't told us yet how you came in. I'd like to know, because we'll have to send some of your wounded out the same way."

Young told us, "Well, I was pretty lucky really. I struck up to the north of the road and did a bit of a circuit round, following the tops of the ridges, and they led me smack into your command post. Can't go wrong really, except at times I could have done with a horse under me. They go along much better over that type of country than I do on my two flat feet."

John took him out and together they went to find Peter. His coming was an immense relief. We had two doctors already, but they were purely technicians—men who could cut off limbs and tidy up wounds and give blood transfusions; they were not organizers, and in any case they were already desperately tired. They had both had so much to do during the last six days that they had averaged only two hours sleep a night, yet their every move required a clear brain and a steady hand.

While John showed the doctor the immensity of his task, Donald spent the night preparing his counter-attack. Donald

was thorough and you need to be thorough when working out details of how to clear an enemy from a group of buildings, particularly when the buildings are in the middle of your own positions. You must take care not to fire this way or that, until you are inside the buildings for fear of hitting your own men; yet you cannot wait until then to open fire because if you do, you will never reach them. The enemy open fire first from the shelter of the buildings as you come across the ground towards them, and the only way to stop them doing this is to shoot back, so that they keep their heads below the brick walls at the base of the bashas. The ideal way to attack buildings is first to smash them with shells or bombs and then, as you go forward to winkle out the enemy, saturate the area in front of you with fire as you go, buildings and all. But there were no guns to fire the shells, nor aircraft to bomb, and the mortars were too inaccurate in that restricted space. So Donald had to think hard, and he had to be sure that the plan he worked out would succeed. There must be no chance of failure.

He chose a flat piece of ground between thick bushes and lit a lamp there, hanging it up on one of the bushes so that it would throw a light down on to the ground. He gathered a number of stones and laid them out in a pattern on the ground, each stone representing one of the bashas he had to attack. He divided the stones between two of his platoons, eight to number ten platoon and nine to number eleven platoon. His third platoon, number twelve, was to give the covering fire.

He dug up the soil and moulded the loose earth until he had a model of the ground round the buildings. After looking at the model, he decided exactly where number twelve platoon should go; on a small ridge commanding the fold in the ground in which the buildings lay. From here they could fire down into the buildings without harming Bobby's men beyond. Then he looked at the ridge again and tried to assess in his mind how long it was and how thick the jungle was there. He decided how many men he would need to man it and he saw at once that the two sections which remained in number twelve platoon would not be enough. He would have to recall Lance-Corporal Harman and his eight men whom he had loaned to Bobby to man the left end of the ridge. He spoke to Bobby on the wireless and Bobby agreed to sneak the men through at night and have them in position by dawn. Because Donald and Bobby had

served together in battle, Donald knew that this would be done.

When he had arranged his covering fire he tried to think out ways and means of gaining easy access into the buildings. If you use the door of a building when the enemy are waiting inside, they shoot you as you enter, so with normal houses you go in by the windows and the door in a concerted rush, all at the same time, first showering the rooms with grenades. But these buildings were not normal; they had no windows, just four walls with a door in one of them and the light coming in through the gaps between the top of the walls and the roof. You could throw grenades through the gaps, but Donald knew that inside were crates and boxes of stores and in some of them, the bakery department of F.S.D., were brick ovens with heavy iron covers. He knew his enemy well enough to realize that they would build shelters of the crates and boxes and would hide in the ovens, so perhaps the grenades would not kill them. He thought the best way would be to blow down the walls. He sent his runner to fetch Lieutenant Wright, the platoon commander of the Indian Sappers and Miners.

Lieutenant Wright was an enthusiast and, like most sappers, a master of improvisation. Since first setting foot in Kohima he had dashed round the area, asking everyone, from the C.O. to the youngest sepoy, whether he could be of help. He had designed the command post and had told the C.O. and Private Heffernan how to timber the roof; he had shown the Indians an easy way of making a slit trench to take a stretcher; he had shown Donald and Bobby and the others how best to shore up the sides of their dug-outs with empty stores boxes; he had dug-in Sergeant King's mortars and made a gadget which tilted them so they could fire two hundred yards nearer to our own men with comparative safety. Even in the short space of forty-eight hours, Donald had been surprised several times by the ingenuity of one so young, for Lieutenant Wright was just nineteen years old. But he was bored only when there was no demand on his inventiveness or work for his hands. There was one thing only which angered him; he had not yet been given a place in the front line.

He had a ready answer to Donald's problem. He had collected hundreds of slabs of guncotton and stored them in his own area within two or three hours of arrival. He explained to Donald how simple it was to tie the slabs to the lid of an

ammunition box and then fix the bundle on to the end of a bamboo pole. He drew a diagram in the earth to show how he would arrange the fuses in such a way that the man using the weapon could blow it off without harm. He explained how his sappers would take the pole charges under cover of fire and place them against the walls of the buildings and blow them in, so making way for Donald's men. And Donald thought this a good idea and arranged for it to be done.

There was just enough room in the bushes and underneath the lamp for one other man beside Donald. When Lieutenant Wright had gone, Donald called in his platoon commanders, one by one, and told them exactly what they were to do. Donald was precise and clear in his orders and the platoon commanders went away to pass them on to their men.

An hour before dawn they crept down in three parties through John Winstanley's 'B' Company on Kuki Picquet. John's men knew where they were going and wished them good luck in low voices as they passed through. Number twelve platoon took up their positions on the low ridge as they had been told and sure enough, on their left flank, Harman and Mathews and Scudder and the six other men in his section were waiting to give support. When the light was strong enough to allow them to see the nearest buildings, Donald realized that one part of his plan had already miscarried before even the attack started. He was relying on the mist, as well as the supporting fire, to cover him across that fold in the ground which divided his men from the bashas. There was no mist, nor was there any cover from undergrowth because in the fold it had been trampled flat. The attacking men had sixty yards of open ground to cover before they reached their objective. But he gave the order to advance and his men went forward.

As soon as they crossed the ridge and started down the far slope the enemy opened a blaze of fire. They were well armed with automatics and, as the attacking troops drew nearer, they showered grenades on them from the buildings. Men fell wounded and dead and the attackers went to ground, taking cover in every little fold and dip they could find. Donald called on his number twelve platoon to increase their fire and they did this and slowly mastered the enemy in the bashas. But off to a flank were two machine guns raking the whole of the little valley with fire and it was these that were now pinning down

the attack. They were hidden in a small building in the trees, away off to the left, so that twelve platoon could not bring fire to bear on them.

When Lance-Corporal Harman saw the threat from these two guns, he told Mathews to move his Bren a little over to the left to give him covering fire while he assaulted the position. Mathews brought his gun to bear and saw Harman climb calmly out of his slit trench and walk towards the machine guns. The Japanese soon saw him coming and brought fire to bear and Mathews saw the bullets clipping up the ground at Harman's feet. But he went on, quite casually, and as he walked he took two grenades from his belt and pulled out the firing pins with his teeth. When he was only thirty yards away from the building he put his rifle on the ground and lobbed the two grenades inside. The machine guns were silent for a moment and Mathews saw Harman pick up his rifle and run forward quickly until he was under the shelter of the wall. Then he disappeared round a corner and an agonized screaming came from the building, and two single shots. Then Harman walked out, carrying one of the machine guns across his shoulders.

All the attacking troops were watching this action, and when they saw Harman come out with the machine gun, they broke into a great cheer and surged forward again. In a moment Lieutenant Wright's Indian sappers were up against the buildings, blasting in the walls. The men streamed in after them, shooting and bayoneting as they went. Then all was confusion, with cursing, sweating, struggling men killing each other in the narrow confines, among the piles of stores and crates and in among the ovens. Donald, who had led the attack into the first building, soon cleared it of the enemy and climbed up on the crates so that he could see what was going on around him. One by one he saw the buildings empty as his men came out, smeared with blood, with clothing scorched and torn, all exhausted after the nervous tension of the attack, the horror of the bayoneting, and the exertion of hand-to-hand combat. Because the buildings were now catching fire, and the ammunition in them exploding, he made them go back across the little valley, away from the confusion and the flames. Donald looked to his right and saw that in that direction the battle had been won. Then he looked to his left; on that side things had not gone so well. There was one basha, a little

larger than the others, in which the enemy were still holding out. The sappers had not been able to blow the walls down, but even as he looked, Lance-Corporal Harman, who had come forward into the attack without orders, disappeared into the doorway.

Harman had seen at once, with extraordinary insight, that this building was not going to fall to the main attack, so he decided that it would fall to him. He went into the building and saw that it was part of the bakery, with ten ovens inside. They were large brick ovens, each large enough to hold a man, with heavy iron covers. As he walked in he was at once shot at from two of the ovens, but the bullets flashed past. He ran out of the door and back across the valley to his own section position where grenades were stored. He seized a box and, dragging it behind him, ran back into the building taking shelter behind the nearest oven. He smashed the box open and pulled out a grenade. He put his left hand on one of the steel covers and let go the safety lever. There was a four-second delay on the fuse, so he waited for three, then lifting the lid, dropped the grenade into the oven. As he let the lid fall back the grenade exploded. He crept round all the other nine ovens and dropped a grenade into each.

The Japs did not seem to know what he was doing, or at least if they did, they knew no way of stopping him. He had trapped them in the ovens because, if they showed their faces for a moment, he would shoot them. When he had finished Harman removed all the lids to make sure that the men inside were dead. There were dead men in five, but in two others the Japs were still alive, though badly wounded. He pulled them out and, taking one under each arm, carried them back across the valley to his section position. As the men saw him return, they went wild with cheering. The cheering became almost hysterical after the excitement of the battle and Donald was unable to stop it.

Meanwhile the bashas were now all afire and in some of them were Japs not yet dead; in others were Indians whom they had captured in the depot and had forced to fire on the attacking soldiers. The Indians ran out first and Donald's men let them go. It was only when the whole area was a blazing inferno that the Japs came out and were shot down one by one by number twelve platoon, who were waiting for them, and

by some of Bobby's men who had now joined the fight from the other side. Then there was a lull in the firing until one last Jap ran into the open. He had stayed too long; his clothes were on fire and, as he ran, he tore at them desperately in jerky, agonized movements. He hurled himself into a small puddle on the ground hoping that the water would put out the fire. But the puddle was too shallow and he lay screaming and scrabbling in the mud until Mathews put a bullet into his body to take away the pain.

The fire died out quickly and the men walked through the area to see what damage they had done. They counted the bodies of forty-four Japanese lying distorted and dead in the smouldering ruins. Among them were a number of their own friends.

John Laverty watched the fighting from behind the ridge. He was pleased at the success of the attack, with the thoroughness with which it had been planned and with the gallant way in which Donald had led his men. He told Donald that he was pleased, and Donald was glad and passed on the honour to the men who had fought with him. The C.O. told him to take up yet another position on F.S.D. Ridge, further forward this time, among the few bashas still standing. He thought that the main Jap attack would, for a time, be concentrated against the two features, D.I.S. and F.S.D., and 'C' Company would be unable to hold out on D.I.S. without someone else in close support. When he was satisfied with the positions Donald had taken up he talked to some of the men who had fought in the action. Then he returned to the command post to find John Young waiting for him.

The doctor described once again the appalling conditions of the wounded in the scattered aid posts and explained how he had now brought them all together into one central dressing station behind the shelter of Summer House Hill. He had persuaded a number of the non-combatants to dig trenches for the lying cases. The most he could accommodate was two hundred wounded and even for these the limited equipment was inadequate, though, should it prove essential, he could carry out certain simple operations. The C.O. asked him what he would use as an operating theatre and he said he was having one dug. John Young had evidently been getting on with things. He finished by saying how important it was to be rid of

the walking wounded as soon as possible and the C.O. told him that Peter would take them out that night, a hundred in all. The doctor insisted on going out with them, in spite of the C.O.'s protests, and went off to see Peter and tell him what he could remember about the route.

Meanwhile, I had two prisoners of war on my hands. I had no interpreter, but I had to get as much information out of them as possible. They had been taken to the dressing station where I found one of them, a lieutenant, being given a blood transfusion. I got nothing from him, because he was unconscious when they brought him in and he died eight hours later. I went through his pockets, but the only thing I found was a cheap metal cigarette case. In it was a photograph of himself and a Burmese girl. They were both naked and he was taking her from behind, standing up.

The other was a corporal. He too was badly wounded, but they patched him up and I sat beside him with a phrase book in one hand and a map in the other. I was with him for four hours, and he talked readily, giving me a good idea of the strength and positions of the 58th Regiment of the Japanese 31st Division, to which he belonged. The regiment numbered five thousand fighting men and the whole was deployed against Kohima, with the main strength to the south. They had come a long march to reach Kohima, but had had little fighting on the way.

I was amazed at the corporal's eagerness to help me, until I discovered later that it was the same with all Jap prisoners. Capture is synonymous with death in the Japanese army; ashes are sent back to the prisoner's family and the man ceases to exist in his own country. They no longer had any loyalty. When I had finished I left the corporal in the dressing station. Eight days later, though our overworked doctors gave him every attention, he died of his wounds. But I had what I wanted.

I took the news back to John in the command post and pointed out that the odds in fighting men were now about seven to one against us. John said, "They'll need more than that to take Kohima." He did not say it in any bragging tone, but as a plain statement of fact. I recalled all I had been taught at the O.C.T.U. where I trained to be an officer. I said, "But that's absurd; suitable odds for a successful attack are only four to one and, mind you, that's when the defenders have selected

their ground and have a proper allocation of artillery and supporting machine guns to help them, in addition to mines and wire and so on. We have none of these things."

John said, "Well, I think we can do it. After all, we don't have to hold on here for ever, only until the rest of Brigade come up." He did not know then that it was going to take a long time for the rest of Brigade to reach us; in fact, he knew too little of what they were doing, even though wireless communication had been open all day. But no doubt there was good reason for the lack of news.

Douglas sat listening in the corner of the dug-out which had now become his own. He made a few notes on his message pad and broke in, "Counting today's casualties, we now have a total of exactly seven hundred and eighty fighting men. That includes an exhausted company of the Assam Rifles and Gurkha and British troops from the convalescent depot who have no officers. Of these we are sending out thirty tonight, the patrol from the 4/7th Rajputs, leaving a total of seven hundred and fifty. I work that out at odds of six point seven to one against, taking it to the nearest decimal point. I consider that heavy odds by any standards.

John said, "Thank you, Douglas, that puts the position very clearly." He went to the wireless set and put on the earphones, while the signals officer handed him the microphone. As he did so, some sheets of lavatory paper fell to the floor. There was writing on the top sheet and I couldn't help noticing that it started, 'My own darling wife.' 'Tops' Topham, the signals officer, spent a lot of time writing letters; now I knew why, though heaven knows when he thought he was going to post them.

John called Brigade and said, "Hullo Able Charlie Dog Three. Skin punctured last night on left side of lower limb. Wound healed by twelve hundred hours today. Body again in good shape. Anything for me? Over."

The reply came back, "Nothing for you. Off." He took off the earphones and closed the set. It was exactly 5.30 p.m. The evening hate started.

The Wounded March Out

THERE were five of us in the dug-out; John Young, Peter Franklin, Douglas, the C.O. and I. We sat with our backs to the earth walls, our legs stretched out into the centre of the floor. There was just room enough and our feet were all touching in the middle. Peter was the trouble down there, with his great body filling the place; from time to time he drew up his knees and stretched them out again as though afraid of cramp. The hurricane lamp was lit and strips of sacking hung over the look-out shaft and the exit, so that no light would escape. We could not afford to show light anywhere in our small area now, because the Japs had their guns on the hills all round; not only the further hills, Workshop Ridge and Aradura Spur, but also the ones close to, J.N.A. Hill and Picquet Hill and the long spur on which the convalescent depot was built. Any show of light drew immediate fire from their quick-firing anti-tank guns and their compact little howitzers. The fire, over open sights, was deadly accurate. The dug-out was still warm from the heat of the day, and airless. Now and then the roof shook as a shell burst nearby, sending down showers of fine earth.

The C.O. was saying, "What's the position, Doc? Can you compete with the numbers you have?"

His friend, the artistic colonel, said, "No, I can't. I've concentrated all the aid posts together now but there are far too many wounded men. You must realize that the place is overlooked by artillery and almost any movement, in spite of the cover of the trees, draws fire. We can only dig at night and, by doing so, we can just keep enough slit trenches dug to compete with the rate of day-to-day wounded; in fact, hardly that. I have at least thirty cases lying on their stretchers in the open and, incidentally, if any more come in tonight, they won't

even have stretchers. There are ninety-eight cases who can walk, but need medical attention. These must go. Somehow we must get them out."

Peter sucked at his empty pipe. Between sucks, he said, "I've spent the best part of today sitting up a tree looking at that north-west exit; the way doc came in. Incidentally, it's bloody uncomfortable sitting up a tree in this place, you're practically eaten alive by ants—but even from there it's difficult to see what the Japs are doing. You see, the ground falls away very steeply from the end of I.G.H. Spur except, of course, where the road runs round Picquet Hill. You can't see down into the valley. The main nullah running away from the spur is deep as hell and there's a tangle of ridges running into it from all directions. The Japs might be on any of these, but the forest is so thick you can't make them out and there's no 'feel' about the place; nothing at all to show what's going on. The only thing we do know is that they have a firm block on the road, so we can't use that."

John said, "Well, the Doc came in all right, he should be able to show you the way out."

John Young replied, "It's very different for Peter and me, with a crowd of men, half of them wounded, than for me alone. That route is no place for a crowd. Some of the ridges are so narrow that it's a hell of a game balancing on top; without the undergrowth and trees to hold on to you couldn't do it. Of course, we might try the nullahs."

Peter said, "No, they're quite impossible; they're strewn with great boulders and drop very steeply. Anyway I, for one, can't tell one nullah from another. No, if we follow them we'll find ourselves in the Jap lines before we've got half way. We'd better stick to the ridges; they must be easier going. And look! I've asked Pawsey for a Naga guide; he has promised me one who may be of help, though I'm dead scared of leaning too much on those chaps."

The C.O. said, "Well, I'm afraid you're for it, both of you, though I don't like the idea of either of you leaving. At least you've some good fighting men with you if you do get involved in a scrap. But I want you back before daylight, and no mistake, even if you have to hand the column over to the Rajput Jemadar once you're through the Jap lines."

Peter sucked and said, "Very good, sir," and he and the

doctor went out. They stumbled through the darkness to I.G.H. Spur where the Jemadar was forming up the column. At that moment one of the wounded men groaned and shone a torch on the sling in which his arm rested. The Jemadar struck the torch from his hand with his pistol butt, abusing the man roundly in Urdu while the others listened. From then on the men were quiet; none showed a light.

Peter took the Jemadar to one side and explained in English what he wanted the men to do. The Jemadar only half understood what he was saying, but the doctor filled in the gaps in fluent Urdu. When the orders had been passed on to the men and the column was ready to go, Peter and John Young took their places in front, with Peter in charge of the operation and the doctor at hand to help. At this moment Pawsey arrived and handed over the Naga guide.

Peter drew his compass from its pouch and took a bearing or two with the luminous dial. He waited for a few moments while he committed the figures to memory, then, hitching his small pack more comfortably on to his shoulders, and pressing forward the safety catch on his Tommy gun, he started off down the spur. The Jemadar, the Rajput riflemen and the wounded men followed him in single file. Dodo Watts, wounded the night before, drew up the rear.

Peter moved quickly down the spur because he knew the ground well. When he reached the road he collected the party and made the Jemadar count them to make sure that all had come through the safety of their own lines. He checked the bearing on his compass and started down into the valley below the road and it was here that his troubles started. The country was thick—dense jungle and forest—and the dark intense, so that he could see nothing except the luminous dial of his compass. The soil was loose and damp, as the soil always is in the jungle where no sun reaches, so that the men slipped and slithered up and down the steep slopes. There was no flat ground to pass over, for the country was all mountains, steep rising.

Peter marched forward very slowly behind the Naga, with the compass always before him in his right hand and feeling his way with his left, his Tommy gun slung over his right shoulder. Behind him came some of the riflemen, and then the wounded for whom the journey was hell because each time they slipped

or fell their wounds jolted and hurt. Though they were Indians, and accustomed to hardship in their day-to-day life, there were some who could not keep back a moan or a cry of pain. At each sound Peter's nerves were on edge because he knew that the Japs were all round them and that the success of his mission depended on them not being found. Behind the wounded came more riflemen.

Peter was glad to have these men with him because, although he could not speak their language and could convey his orders only by signals or through the Jemadar, he knew that if they did meet the Japs, these riflemen would fight it out in the way he wanted. They would fight it out to the very last rifleman because they were good soldiers, from Rajputana, and they were proud men with a military tradition in their blood. Because this tradition ran strong in their veins, they would rather die than be beaten, even by immensely superior odds. You did not have to know the Rajput soldier to appreciate his fighting value; it was plain to see in his flashing eyes and hawk-like nose, in his firm chin and his fiercely proud bearing.

Although the night was cold, they had not gone far before Peter was sweating. The sweat ran down his forehead into his eyes so that he had to wipe it away before he could see the dial of his compass which he looked at every few minutes. The sweat soaked into his tunic so that the sling of his Tommy gun and the straps of his pack rubbing the wet cloth made his shoulders sore. Each time he stumbled off the track or missed his way he had to retrace his steps and start again and this was not easy because he was never quite sure just where he had gone wrong, nor could the Naga tell him. He sweated on through the darkness, cursing gently all the time, with his pipe in his mouth. Peter's pipe and his nerves were complementary.

For the wounded men behind him the journey was even worse, because they too were sweating and carrying packs, and in addition each one had a gaping hole in his body, or his skin torn or a bone broken. At each fall the wound hurt and started bleeding. The men had nothing with which to stem the flow of blood, for the doctor could not let them take away any of his valuable supplies of bandages or pads. Some of them tore the tails off their tunics and held these against the wounds, but the others who were too dull or weak just let the blood flow.

Peter kept them moving all the time, for he knew that once

he halted the columns he would never persuade all the men to move on again, not even with the help of the Jemadar. Some of them would move, those who were least tired or in little pain, but others would say that they would rather stay there and die than rise up and move forward another step. Then Peter would have to leave them to die, so he gave them no chance for rest.

After the first three hours' marching Peter began to feel safer, for he guessed he must by then have gone well over one mile and his compass told him he had been moving directly away from Kohima. He knew that if the Japs were on that side, they would be investing the town close to, so he thought that by now he was probably through their lines. His only fear was that he might run into a party resting for the night or coming back from some patrol.

But though fear of capture was less imminent he still had to find the way. Though the Naga was of great help, the responsibility was Peter's, and neither knew how much he could depend on the other. It is quite easy, even in broad daylight, to turn a complete circle in dense jungle without being aware of it. Even with a compass in your hand it is easy to go wrong because, after a while, you begin to have confidence in your own sense of direction. You see from your map that a certain ridge runs south and you are sure you are on that ridge. All the time you are on the ridge you must be going south, so when the needle of the compass begins to flicker a little to the east or to the west, you persuade yourself that you are still on the ridge and that the compass must soon turn south again. You go on doing this until you suddenly realize that you are lost, that you have left your well-known ridge and are on another one, going due east, perhaps. Then you can do one of two things; you can turn back and retrace all the agonizing steps you have hacked out from the unyielding undergrowth with such fearful toil during the last two or three or four hours, until you come back to your ridge; or you can turn south again and follow the compass needle and hope that it will bring you out somewhere near where you are trying to go. And this, by day.

At night you have no map, only the few contours which you can remember through staring at them hour after hour in the daytime before you start your journey. Then it is wiser to be guided entirely by your compass and follow the little luminous arrow which points the way you want to go. This would seem

easy, but it is not so, because never do you want to travel throughout the whole journey in one direction. On this night Peter had to go first north-west for some three miles, then due south until he reached the road. If he turned south too soon, he would hit the road on that strip which was held by the Japanese, so he had to be certain that he first covered his three miles. When walking through jungle, with the ground rising and falling, there is no sure way of measuring distance. You can count paces and multiply by two to allow for the rise and fall of the ground—he made the Jemadar do this; you can keep time and estimate an average pace of, say, six hundred yards in each hour; or you can just follow your nose and hope for the best. But none of these methods is in the least degree accurate; there is quite a lot of luck in it.

Peter had his luck, and after five hours' marching, when it was just midnight, he turned south. After another two hours he came on to the main road and saw at once that he was west of the forty-second milestone. He turned towards Kohima and marched up the road with the riflemen marching smartly in step, urging on the wounded men. Soon he was challenged and gave the password. There was a small aid post on a terrace just below the road with a doctor in charge, a young captain who took over the wounded and gave Peter and John Young a cup of tea and a pipeful of tobacco. When they had finished their tea and smoked a pipe, they left the shelter and security of the aid post and walked back with the Naga down the road. They turned off in the same place where they had brought the wounded out of the jungle—Peter had marked it by placing a long stick across the road. Then they scrambled north along the track which the crowd of men had made and after one hour—they were travelling much quicker now that they were alone—they turned south-east through the jungle and made for Kohima. They arrived back ten minutes before daylight.

While Peter and the doctor were struggling through the darkness with the wounded, Bobby Shaw and his 'C' Company were once again in trouble. The first we knew was when Bobby reported on the wireless at nine o'clock that the Japs were forming up on Jail Hill for another attack. John Laverty called through the passage which connected our command post with Yeo's and told him to bring the guns to bear.

Yeo had that day made contact with the rest of his regiment

in position behind Jotsoma, three miles away. There were ten 3.7 inch howitzers there, screw guns, and all of them could bring fire to bear on Jail Hill and on the enemy positions to the west of Kohima, for these were just within range. The shells they fired were small, but the guns were deadly accurate and the gunners, Sikhs and Pathans, with British officers in charge, were very good indeed. Yeo had told them during the day of all the important positions to our west and south so that they could survey them in on their maps and on their plotting boards. They had even ranged on to some of the more important, so that all Yeo had to do was to call them up on the set and say, "D.F.—S O S Three"—'three' was the number allotted to Jail Hill. No sooner had he given the order than we heard the faint noise of the guns firing and immediately afterwards the crump of the shells bursting. The guns hurled round after round of rapid fire into the Japs assembled there.

Sergeant King had his mortars placed so that he could bring four of them to bear on to this vital feature. Because of his own skill, and the ingenuity of Lieutenant Wright, he could bring the bombs down close to our own troops; so he added the weight of his bombs to the fire of the screw guns. After thirty minutes' firing Bobby reported that no attack had come in and that the enemy had dispersed. Yeo told the gunners away behind Jotsoma that this was so. They stopped firing and the night was quiet.

In the silence the Japs brought another weapon to bear, a loudspeaker installed in the fort. A harsh tenor voice came loud across the valley between the fort and our positions, speaking in Urdu: "*Hindustan ke jawan!*"—"Soldiers of India, the Japanese army has surrounded you. Bring your rifle and come over to us." Then some Bren-gunner fired a long burst in the direction of the voice, but even before the echo of the shots had died away the answer came: "*Maro, bhai, maro.*"—"Shoot, brother, shoot," and the peroration continued. While the voice droned on repeating the same formula over and over, the Indians lay on the ground and in their trenches, listening. Those who knew the Japs smiled; others, who were afraid, would have liked to go; but none went.

Then the sounds of battle came again from the D.I.S., drowning the voice, and we knew that 'C' Company were being attacked once more. The fighting flared up and died away and

Bobby told us that another attack had been beaten off. An hour later the sounds came to us again and once more Bobby's men repelled the hordes of invaders. When he reported he explained how the Japs were now approaching to within thirty or forty yards of his position without his being aware of it. The gunfire which we called for was no longer breaking up the forward elements of the attack, although it was preventing the enemy feeding in reinforcements and keeping up the pressure. Bobby asked us to keep the gunfire going whenever he called for it, not only because it killed enemy, but because it kept up his men's morale.

When you are crouching in a hole in the darkness, perhaps alone, or perhaps with one other man beside you, and you cannot see or hear your comrades to the right or to the left until they fire; and when, out of the darkness, comes a screaming mob of Japanese intent on killing you and you shoot one and another comes and then another and another, the sound of shells falling just behind those Japanese is a cheerful sound. Somehow you no longer feel that you are fighting the battle alone.

In his last report Bobby said that his casualties were increasing and his numbers were thin on the ground, so John asked me to go and find out exactly what was happening. He would have gone himself if he could, but now that the Japs were attacking only at night, and shelling by day, he had to stay in the command post during the hours of darkness, awake all the time, because the attacks came quickly and the C.O. was called on, often, to make rapid decisions. He knew that the enemy were now gathering round the D.C.'s bungalow and to the west of I.G.H. Spur. At any moment he was expecting attacks from either direction and, if they came, he would have to be in the centre of things, where the officers could easily reach him. From that evening on, throughout the rest of the battle, John spent each night awake in the command post. During the day he paid occasional visits to his men out in the forest and, when the shelling allowed, slept in snatches.

I stumbled down the slopes of Summer House Hill and through John Winstanley's men, who were taking what sleep they could on Kuki Picquet, over F.S.D. Hill, through the burnt-out bashas and vehicles into Bobby's area. Because I went a little out of my way in the darkness, the first I knew

that I was in the area was when I fell into a trench and heard a voice say, "Christ, who the — 'ell was that?"

I told him, "The I.O.," and he said, "Oh! Good evening, sir."

Until I joined them the trench had been shared by two privates—Burrows and Roden. These two were in Lance-Corporal Harman's section and with him, after the battle in the F.S.D., had been returned to Bobby and placed once again on the perimeter. Roden said, "We've 'ad a — awful night, sir. They've come in three times already, but the first time the guns bust 'em up and the other two times we bust 'em up and now we're waiting for more."

Burrows said, "If we kill any more we'll 'ave 'em piling up on top of us—there can't be no more room for another Jap in the road, there's thousands of 'em down there, all dead. They'll be stinking like 'ell in a couple of days."

I asked them how they were doing for sleep and Roden answered, "Not too bad, sir. We can't get any nights, of course, because the little bastards keep coming at us all the time, but we do orl right in the day—about three or four hours in between shelling and stag." I stayed with them for a while, listening out on to Jail Hill, and I heard nothing, but I was glad that my duties did not take me all day and all night on to the perimeter.

As all was quiet I left the two men and went to find Bobby. He told me he had had fifteen men evacuated wounded or dead from his positions after the attacks and he thought there must be some more still lying about whom he had not yet been able to find. I reckoned this figure would reduce his company strength to about half of what it should be and I made a note to check with Douglas when I returned, because he, of course, would have the exact figures. I stayed talking to Bobby for a while and in the end he told me that, if another two attacks came in before he was reinforced, he was afraid the Japs would break in, because they would find the gaps in his ranks and would infiltrate through them. He had nothing with which to close the gaps. So I left him and stumbled back to the command post to report this to the C.O. Douglas confirmed that Bobby's men were now very thin on the ground.

The C.O. listened; he weighed up the strengths of the other companies, the sizes of the areas they were holding, and all the

other details which had a bearing on the decision he was asked to make. He weighed them up carefully and methodically and then decided that he would have to reinforce Bobby in the morning with some of the Headquarter Company men; there was no sense in sending them down at night. Then he told me to get some sleep, so I left the command post and fell into my own slit trench which was dug nearby. As I dozed off the loud-speaker started blaring again, "*Hindustan ke jawan, Hindustan ke jawan. . .*" The phrase kept repeating itself in my dreams.

John Harman Dies

AT six-thirty I was awake again to hear what had become our reveille, "Top o' the morning to ye, sir, 'tis a bright and lovely day," and Heffernan was standing offering me a quarter of a mug of tea. He said, "Pardon me, sir, but the C.O. would like to see you."

I rubbed the sleep from my eyes and poured the tea down in one gulp. It did not take me long to get up, because all I had to do was fold my blanket and lay it at one end of the slit trench. I picked up my pistol and squinted through the barrel to make sure it was clean; then I put it in the holster and crawled the ten yards to the command post. I saw Peter first, sucking his pipe as usual. I said, "Hullo, Peter, nice to see you back. How did the trip go?"

He took the pipe from his mouth and said, "Oh, pretty well really. That Jemadar's quite a character. He saw us through, together with the Naga."

Douglas interrupted, "The C.O. wants you to take the admis down to Bobby. I'm afraid we could only rustle up fifteen of them, but until we know for certain how the Japs are lining up against us, we feel we can't spare any more."

Douglas always spoke in the first person plural when he was handing on the C.O.'s orders. By 'we', of course, he meant John Laverty, but by now he had so immersed his personality into John's that he felt the two of them were one person. John provided the brain and he the mouthpiece. This was how John liked it, because in Douglas he had the perfect mouthpiece. That he had such a man to help him was of vital importance to the C.O. because the weight of responsibility which bore on his shoulders was as great as any man should be asked to bear. That he was able to bear it was largely due to Douglas, who

relieved him of the need to take any detailed actions on the decisions he gave and so freed him to think and to inspire.

This is the way leadership must work in war. The leader of men faces each day in the knowledge that their lives are in his care; that it will depend on his decisions and on his actions as to how many of those men will die, for it is quite certain that some will. John Laverty had carried that load every day for two years and it was only people like Douglas who made his life tolerable.

I asked Douglas where the men were waiting and he took me over to where they were hiding in the bushes. There were five drivers and four cooks whom we thought we could dispense with. There were six whom I had never seen before and Douglas explained that they had been in the convalescent depot when the Japs arrived. They were fit now, so we took them on strength and they very soon became a part of the unit. I took them down and handed them over to Bobby and explained that they were all he could have for the moment. He was disappointed, because they would not fill the gaps in his ranks, but he understood and sent them out to the platoons which needed them most.

The journey back, short as it was, took a long time, because the Japs were putting down one of their intermittent artillery concentrations on to the area. They did this every day. We never knew when they were coming and each concentration would last for about half an hour; then there would be a pause while we waited for the next one. In between the concentrations snipers, who had been hoisted into the trees overlooking the area, shot at anything they could see moving. Both the Japanese gunners, and their snipers, were accurate. They had marched a hundred and fifty miles to reach us and they had brought with them only limited quantities of ammunition. They placed a high value on each shell and bullet, so the gunners and snipers were told to make sure that none was wasted.

Their seventy-five millimetre guns did not look up to much—just a short piece of piping on a wooden framework with two small wheels. Although these guns could be pulled along by four men harnessed to the framework, they were efficient enough to project the shell in exactly the right direction. The snipers were specially trained to the job; they climbed to the tops of the tallest trees and roped themselves to the trunk. One

sniper, sitting in a tree top, would observe three or four square yards of ground, as much as he could see through the other trees which grew round about. If anyone moved into his own patch of ground, he was quick to aim and press the trigger; and the aim was generally good. Because they tied themselves to the trunks, even if we could discover where they were shooting from and fired back, we were never sure whether or not we had killed them because they did not fall out of the trees. The inexperienced soldier would fire four or five rounds, instead of one, to kill a sniper, and while he was firing there were other snipers taking note of his position and passing the news down to his comrades who were due to attack that night.

The shelling and sniping meant that the men had to stay all the time, both night and day, either near or in their slit trenches and it allowed them very little sleep. As more men were wounded and killed, so there was less sleep for the ones who were left.

The journey from the D.I.S. Spur back to the command post was a matter of dodging from one hole in the ground to another; waiting for a slight lull in the shelling and dashing over to the next hole, hoping all the time that you did not cross one of those small patches of ground watched by a sniper. My journey took me past the top of Summer House Hill and I saw that Yeo had built himself an observation post up there. He had made the State Force soldiers rig a platform of bamboo, sited so that he could see, through gaps in the trees, the tops of the surrounding hills. By moving a little this way or that on his platform he could cover practically the whole circuit. He was sitting completely exposed and calmly plotting the flashes of the enemy guns. As I came past he clambered off the platform and showed me the marks on his map. He said, "They've brought some quick-firing anti-tank guns up to join their artillery on G.P.T. and Workshop Ridges. We can't reach the latter from Jotsoma and, from what I can see through my binoculars, they've dug them in very cunningly on G.P.T. Ridge so I doubt if we can knock them out."

He was right: we could not knock them out, and the quick-firing guns, when firing from close range, were very bad for morale. We had warning of normal shelling because the noise of the shell leaving the gun came that fraction of a second before it fell on the target; but with the anti-tank guns the

shell arrived first, so there was no time to duck, nor was there any indication of where it had come from.

It was the same, to a slightly lesser degree, with their seventy-five millimetre guns. As Yeo explained, "They now have artillery on every feature overlooking us, on Bare Ridge, in the fort area, on the Convalescent Depot Spur and also, of course, on J.N.A. and Picquet Hills. If I were a Jap gunner with that set-up, I would make quite sure that every yard of this area was covered by direct fire. You can bet they've done the same. You will find also that when the shelling has stripped the trees they will be able to see all the ground as well." Again Yeo was proved to be right. Because the seventy-five millimetre guns were so close, their shells arrived before the warning sound of their being fired.

There was one other horrible aspect of this continual shelling, tree-bursts. When a shell bursts on the ground a soldier comes to no harm provided he is in a proper trench, even though he may be quite near the centre of the burst; but a tree-burst throws the broken fragments down into the trenches so they offer no protection, unless there is head cover. But head cover restricts the soldier's ability to use his weapon and it is of paramount importance that he should have free use of it. As time allowed we dug covered trenches beside the open ones into which men could retire during shelling, but we lost many men from tree-bursts before we were able to do this. The open trenches had to be dug and manned first.

After talking these matters over with Yeo, I watched him clamber up on to the platform and start spotting the flashes while the shells dropped round him. Every now and then he would leave his platform and we would hear him passing the information to the guns down at Jotsoma. He did this because he himself had nothing with which to hit back at the Jap guns; but at Jotsoma there were ten 3.7 inch howitzers and it was by using these against the Jap artillery that he could best help us.

Soon after I returned to the command post the shelling stopped and the loudspeakers up in the fort started again. All the time there was some weapon directed against us; guns or snipers, rifles or loudspeakers by day, and at night constant attacks by overwhelming numbers of fresh troops. This time the loudspeakers turned their attention to the British soldiers. The voice said, "Soldiers of England, you are good soldiers and

brave soldiers. Come over and join your Japanese brothers and we will make you all Jemadars." The soldiers of England smiled; most of them because they did not know what a Jemadar was and all of them because they knew that the Jap was no brother of theirs. They had a song about that. Heffernan, who was cleaning the C.O.'s pistol, looked up and asked, "What's this Jemadar they keep talking about?"

Douglas answered, "They have Jemadars in the Indian Army commanding platoons; they are a sort of second lieutenant."

Heffernan said, "Bejasus an' I don't want to be one o' them. Me brain's enough fogged by bein' a private, let alone a bloody lootenant."

The command post was busy that day. Because we could not afford the time to dig another place where Douglas or I could interview visitors, John Lavery had to see them all; and people came to see him only when they had some problem, real or imaginâry, or wanted some advice or a decision from him.

Officers from garrison headquarters were some who came, officers who were supposed to help look after the garrison troops, but for whom the situation was proving too much. They came fussing about the safety of the Indian non-combatants, and well they might worry, because the Indians were frightened men who did not know where to look for leadership. The command and staff of the garrison of Kohima were either unequal or unwilling to take the task of commanding our battalion, and thus it came about that the defence of Kohima was conducted from our headquarters.

Throughout the battle the non-combatants moved in helpless droves over the area, trying to find a safe place to settle down. Two or three hundred would huddle together in a group on the slopes of I.G.H. Spur and when the shells began to fall near them they would move in a mass to Kuki Picquet and stay there for a while. Then an attack would come in on the D.I.S. Feature nearby and they would move away again and settle, perhaps, near the command post, until that became too dangerous. Then on again to look for another place not already occupied by their friends. They were a disorderly mob of refugees, trying to find a way of escape from a terror which lay, not only behind them, but all round them. There was no escape, nor was anyone at that time in a position to bring them to

order. John soothed the officers' fears and explained that the only safe place for these men was underground. They went away, with worry creasing their foreheads, to try to persuade the wretched men to dig.

Then came the District Commissioner, Mr. Pawsey, the very best type of colonial administrator; tough, forthright, honest and completely devoted to the Nagas who were his special charge. He was wearing grey flannel trousers and a white open-necked shirt, with brogue shoes; an incongruous figure among us dirty, uniformed soldiers. His concern was not for the few Nagas inside the Kohima defences, but for those on the outside who were, perhaps, in Japanese hands. Pawsey wanted to find out what had happened to them and whether they were now helping the Japs. John had to tell him that this was impossible. Mr. Pawsey found it hard to accept the fact that there was little a civilian could do in these conditions; he had to eat out his heart in idleness while the Japs swarmed over his beloved country and among the people to whom he was devoting his life. He managed, in spite of all the difficulties, to organize an intelligence service from the few Nagas still in touch with him. The information brought in by these wild and friendly people was fed into our headquarters and proved invaluable. Later on, when the ring was broken and he was able to go out into the country, he banded the Nagas into teams of guides and stretcher-bearers who helped thousands of British soldiers in the later stages of the fighting, and into guerilla parties who constantly harassed the Japanese lines of communication.

Then Sergeant King came. He was not worried, he never was, but he had a problem which he could not solve by himself; he had to have his C.O.'s permission. His mortars, which had done so much to break up the Japanese attacks of the night before, had been spotted by their flashes and the enemy were now concentrating artillery fire against them. King was anxious to move them to new positions. He had found suitable places, but because the area was so small and the number of men so great, they were already occupied by perimeter troops or by non-combatants or wounded men. He asked the C.O. if he could take some of them over for his mortars. John and Douglas put their heads together and worked out what was best to do and the C.O. then gave Sergeant King his answer. The sergeant

then asked for more men because many of his own had been killed by the shelling. Douglas, who had all the figures, explained that there were only five trained mortarmen out with the companies and Sergeant King said that this was not enough, but he would take any men who were going spare. He reckoned that he could train them even while they fired the mortars at the enemy. Because the mortars were so vitally important, John promised the sergeant his men and Douglas went off to round them up. In this way three men from the convalescent depot who had been machine-gunners, two quartermasters' storemen and five carrier drivers who had no carriers to drive, became mortarmen. Because Sergeant King knew how to handle both men and mortars, they soon became good mortarmen, those of them who lived long enough.

Then came Padre Randolph. He did not come into the command post, because he seemed shy of approaching the C.O., but he called me out and we crouched together in one of the slit trenches while he talked. He was a man of immense and real courage. He was intelligent and imaginative; bombing, shelling and the sight of suffering filled him with genuine fear, but only once did he show it, for one brief moment in the Arakan when we were all trembling under terrific bombardment. Wherever the men were in danger, distress or loneliness, there was the padre, giving comfort and courage. It is impossible to estimate how much we all owed to his wonderful Christian leadership:

He was tall, but thin and stooped, and he had an ascetic's face. He had spent much of his life in India and had seen plenty of suffering in his time. Even so, because he lived among the wounded in the dressing station, with their crying always in his ears, their suffering impinged on his mind day and night while the delicate balance of reasoning which compelled him to support his fellow men in the un-Christian practice of war stretched his faith to the uttermost. To him the army was a strange place, and the officers hard men, particularly John Laverty and the Brigadier who gave John his orders. He thought they did too little to relieve the suffering. He could not see that they felt it too, although they did not live in the dressing station and had other things to occupy their minds. In many ways it was even harder for them to bear because the responsibility for it rested on their shoulders and they were in no way free to

show their emotions; if they did, they would soon succumb and the battle they had been ordered to win would be lost.

So the padre's worry was what to do with the wounded. He thought that the C.O. and the Brigadier between them ought to make some arrangements for moving them to a proper hospital, away from the constant shelling and hideous discomfort, but he had no concrete suggestions as to what arrangements could be made. We could all see the padre's point of view so clearly and we were amazed that, feeling as he did, he could spend day after day, and night after night, among the tortured bodies, sharing their pain, and still keep strong and true, to his faith. We loathed as much as he the dirty and dangerous dressing station with the bleeding bodies and twisted minds lying in open pits, helpless and fearful; but there was nothing we could do about it. We had a battle on our hands which we had to win the best way we could, and none of us knew how to win a battle without subjecting men to death or injury.

I asked the padre why he did not talk matters over with the C.O., but he said he did not want to worry him. After a while he went away, back to the suffering, and I went into the command post to tell John what he had said. When I had finished a momentary expression of pain came into the C.O.'s face, but he said nothing; instead he and Douglas went for an afternoon's walk round the area. Because the walk was full of danger, I took my place at the wireless set and listened in to the reports of his progress as they came from each company headquarters.

That evening a terrific bombardment took the place of the normal evening hate. Howitzers, anti-tank guns, and the mortars which the Japs had now brought up alongside their guns, poured round after round into the small area and many of them fell on to the dressing station where forty men, already wounded and lying in the open, were again wounded or killed where they lay.

For us in the command post, the most disturbing effect of this tremendous weight of fire was that it was a prelude to another series of determined attacks on Bobby and his men down on D.I.S. They repelled no fewer than five attacks that night, each one launched against the tired men by fresh troops. After a while the enemy's hammer blows began making dents in the perimeter; and then gaps began to appear in the outer

ring of the defences as men were killed or maimed in the fury of the fighting.

Private Burrows found himself alone at midnight, for Roden was dead, and the trench on his right was empty; he knew this because there was no sound of fire coming from it. Lance-Corporal Harman still had his friend Mathews with him, but the man's right hand was smashed. He had bound it up with his field-dressing and continued firing his Bren with his left hand. In other sections the numbers were thinning out and the effect of this was that the Japs attacking began to find the gaps, the trenches with dead bodies in them, the guns and rifles no longer manned. When they found them they moved in and passed the message back to their friends who filed in behind them, so that Bobby's men gradually became aware that the enemy had broken through their lines and were moving about among the trees between and behind them. But the enemy still had to face the reserve platoon, small as it was, and this platoon drove them back, time and time again, and pushed them out by the ways they had come in.

By first light the pressure began to tell, and it told first on Sergeant Tacon's platoon, which now numbered only twelve men out of the thirty-six with which he had started the battle. Sergeant Tacon was commanding the platoon because the boy officer who had previously been in charge had been shot in the stomach by a sniper the day before; Sergeant Tacon had watched him die in agony in a little clearing only ten yards away and was determined to avenge his death. But hard as he fought, the Japs that night slowly wore him down by sheer weight of numbers and by dawn a party of them had passed through and set themselves up on a small ridge from which they overlooked the whole of 'C' Company's position.

There were only five Japanese, but they had one machine gun and two light automatics and it would need a properly planned attack to drive them out. They were well placed, and properly protected, but they had not yet finished with Sergeant Tacon.

He had foreseen such an incident as this and the evening before had crawled down to see Lance-Corporal Harman in charge of the section immediately on his right. He and Harman discussed what might happen in the night and they agreed that, should Tacon's men be driven back, Harman with his

section would counter-attack into the flank of the attacking enemy. Then Tacon saw Harman's platoon commander who agreed to the arrangement.

When Harman saw the Japs entrenched on the ridge, he decided to counter-attack. He said to Jim, "I can do this best by myself. If I sneak up behind them they won't see me coming, but if we all go they're bound to spot us."

Jim answered, "Now don't be a clot, John, we can all muck in on this and give the bastards a proper bashing."

Harman ordered, "Now do what you're told—take your Bren over there behind that tree and keep the bastards' heads down."

Jim said, "O.K., Corp," and moved away. Harman noticed the other men conforming with his order; it was strange how readily they obeyed him.

He climbed out of the trench and walked forward, deliberately, making no use of the cover offered by the few bushes still standing, or by the trees. He walked to and fro, searching for the best position from which to overlook the enemy, until he found a place which gave him a good view of one of them. He stopped there and, raising his rifle, shot him dead. Then, still walking slowly, he moved on. By now they had seen him and were shooting back, but Jim Mathews was not giving them a moment's peace, even though he found it awkward handling the Bren with his left hand. As Harman moved in, his head thrust forward, his hair falling over the low forehead, his solid body a little ungainly on its odd-sized feet, he must have looked to the Japs like some monster, sent by a strange god they had offended, and equipped with a shield, proof against the bullets they fired at him in a constant stream. They could hardly realize that it was a shield of some skill, of immense courage and unshakeable faith.

Still moving forward he raised his rifle a second time and shot dead another Jap. Then he paused, crouched low behind a bush, to fix his bayonet, before going forward again, now a little faster, though still at little more than walking pace. He held the rifle out in front of his barrel chest, pointing towards the three remaining enemy whose fire was now panicky and ill-aimed. He advanced deliberately, his head lowered so that the thick neck was barely visible, until he topped the small ridge. Then he leapt down into the machine-gun post and

disappeared from Jim Mathews's view. The young soldier saw occasional glimpses of the cut and thrust of his rifle, of the quick movements of his tousled head; he heard one scream of agony, then another, then one single shot. A moment later John Harman appeared on the ridge, holding the Jap machine-gun high above his head for all the soldiers to see before flinging it down on the ground.

A cry went up from the nearest soldiers, "Good old John, he's done it again," and the cry spread through the trees to the rest of the company, and then up the ridge to the other companies, until the whole area was ringing with cheering and shouting. The officers, although they realized the danger, let the men shout and yell because they knew it was good for them to let loose their pent-up feelings; they were all living on nervous energy, and many on borrowed courage. It would do no harm to borrow courage from John Harman who had enough for a whole army. The Japs, too, must have heard the cheering and can have drawn little comfort from it.

John Harman clambered off the ridge and started walking across the small valley to rejoin his section. Soon he became aware of men shouting from the other side and saw Jim Mathews standing up, yelling frantically, "For Christ's sake, run, you bloody fool, run, run, RUN," but he continued his steady march forward. His mind was clear, his blood cool, his heart steady. He had done what anyone else might have done in the same circumstances; he was going back now to take his place at the head of his section.

As he reached the middle of the little valley a Jap machine gun fired from further along the ridge behind his right shoulder. The burst of fire caught him at the base of his spine, hurling him to the ground. Jim at once dashed out, while the others poured a hail of fire into the Jap position, until now unseen. The red and green tracer bullets of the defenders wove patterns over his head, the clamour of battle echoed all round as Jim Mathews heaved his friend's body on to his back. Spasms of agony wrenched at his wounded right arm as he staggered up the hillside, gasping for breath, pouring out sweat, driven to his knees by the weight of his burden. At last, as the action died away and smoke drifted quietly across the battleground, he lowered John Harman gently into the trench they had shared. Harman's eyes were closed, and Jim, kneeling over him, slapped

him gently on the face to bring him round. The eyes opened and John Harman spoke, "I'm dying. I've got to go."

Jim answered, "Don't be a fool, John, you ain't finished yet. Think of all them judies waiting for you outside. I'll get the doc down in a minute."

"No, Jim, I don't need a doctor. He has enough to do without another on his hands." His eyes closed again, while his head dropped back on to his friend's knee. Jim waited, murmuring urgent, meaningless phrases.

Five minutes later John Harman raised his head once more. He said, "I got the lot—it was worth it." Then he died. There was a sudden silence over the battlefield, broken only by the distant crumping of shell fire on the other side of Summer House Hill. Smoke curled lazily upward into the tree tops.

Sergeant Tacon went down to report the action to Bobby. His journey was perilous, for snipers were still in the trees and the night's fighting and shelling had cleared yet more of the undergrowth and foliage. Dodging from cover to cover he reached the small command post and told his company commander what the position was with his platoon. Bobby knew already that it was critical; that there was still a yawning gap in his defences, a gap which, but for John Harman's brilliant action, would already have caused the downfall of his position. He had no men with whom to fill the gap and there was only one way to hold the enemy out: by gunfire. He already had good support on to Jail Hill, but the guns were not registered on to the routes the Japs were now using to the east and west of the hill. He sent urgently for Yeo and within twenty minutes the gunner came to meet him. With Sergeant Tacon they started walking round the area.

They had gone only a few yards when a shell burst in the trees above, the force of the explosion throwing Bobby to the ground. At first he was unaware that he had been hit, but when he tried to get up, he found that his right leg was useless. He looked down and saw a great rent in his clothing, the torn and scorched material being blasted into his skin so that when he pulled at it chunks of skin and flesh came with it. He wiped the blood away with the hem of his tunic and saw a four-inch gash in his thigh. He moved his leg a little while the agony streamed through his body and the bones inside grated, so that he knew they were broken.

Yeo and the sergeant ran forward to pull him quickly back out of the tiny clearing they had been crossing. Bobby fainted with the pain of being moved, but soon came round again and called for his signaller who crept forward and handed him the microphone. Bobby reported to the C.O. on the situation in his company, then told him that he had been wounded and would have to go over to the dressing station. He laid down the microphone and ordered the sergeant, "Get hold of Gordon—I mean Mr. Inglis—as soon as you can and tell him to take over the company."

The sergeant replied, "I'm afraid 'e's 'ad it too, sir. I saw them carrying 'im up the 'ill earlier on. They told me 'e got one in the stummick."

Bobby took up the microphone again to pass this news to the C.O. and suggest that Tom Coath should take over his company. Then he passed out again. In a moment Corporal Day and a medical orderly came alongside and rolled him carefully on to a stretcher. They lifted the load and staggered up the hillside towards the dressing station, while the snipers tried to pick them off. Yeo moved off into the trees to carry on with his reconnaissance, while the sergeant turned to the signaller and said, "The —— bastards!" But the young man had no answer; tears were streaming from his eyes.

Easter Day

WHILE reports were coming into the command post of attack after attack on Bobby's men, there were reports equally alarming from the D.C.'s bungalow area and from I.G.H. Spur. The bungalow was held at this time by a mixture of Gurkhas and British soldiers from the convalescent depot, and good soldiers they were, but their leaders were unproved and, because we had not met them before, we were not sure how far we could trust them.

The reports they were sending in were that the Japs were forming up on the spur opposite them and on the other side of the road running across the south-east corner of the bungalow garden. We had little doubt that these reports were true because we were sure that even the Jap, stupid as he is, would hardly go on banging his head against the brick wall that was 'C' Company. We thought that he would try elsewhere and as each report came in of more troops massing, we called in Sergeant King and told him to bring his mortars to bear. To do this he had to take away support from Bobby's men.

This was another decision for the C.O. to make, a difficult one because he could not be sure where the greatest danger lay. As he took the mortar fire off Jail Hill and transferred it to the new target, he called through to Yeo and asked him to step up the fire of the guns on the old one. No sooner had this been done than similar reports started coming from I.G.H. Spur. The C.O. decided to do nothing about these for the moment because the defenders there were in good positions on top of a steep precipice which dropped sheer for one hundred feet on to the road. But we were all glad when daylight came and no attacks had developed on these two fronts.

As usual, the day passed quietly except for the intermittent

shelling, the mortaring and the sniping. But the C.O. was busy. First he had to arrange for Tom to go down and take over 'C' Company and with him he had to send reinforcements which had to be rounded up from anywhere they could be found. At the same time he placed Donald in charge of the whole area covering the D.I.S. and F.S.D. features, for these two areas had now merged into one so far as the fighting was concerned. He then called Brigade on the wireless, gave them the latest picture and, in turn, asked them for what they knew.

They told him that the enemy were massing in Naga Village to our north-east, and beyond the Fort. He was told that the enemy had captured this village four days ago and had been pouring troops into it ever since. As soon as I heard this I knew that a new Japanese formation must be joining the battle, though I could not tell at this stage which one.

They told him also that more Japs were moving on to Bare Ridge and on to the hills at either end. They told him that the other two battalions in the Brigade, the Punjabis and the Rajputs, were trying to move up from Jotsoma towards Lancaster Gate and Punjab Ridge, but they could give us no clear indication of their progress.

While the C.O. was speaking, Douglas, with one of the spare pair of earphones on his head, took down notes of all that concerned our own troops while I, listening in on the other earphones, took down all that was said about the enemy. As he handed the microphone back to the signaller, the C.O. said to me, "What the heck are the Japs up to? It looks to me as though they have abandoned their idea of going for Dimapur and the Ledo Railway and have turned back on us."

At this I asked him for time for thought because I could not believe that they would be so stupid as to concentrate on Kohima, which was of importance to them only because it threatened their one road, while in Dimapur were thousands of tons of food and ammunition practically unguarded. But the fact remained that if those troops now streaming into Naga Village came from a formation other than their 58th Regiment, then they must be turning back on Kohima. I tried once again to put myself in the mind of the Japanese commander, Lieutenant-General Sato, Katetu. The more I thought on these lines, the more convinced I became that he must still have Dimapur as his main objective; and yet the evidence was

against me. I did not know then how completely hidebound was the Japanese training for war. When a commander, however senior, was given an order, it was his duty to obey it to the letter, even though the situation might change. This dangerous practice was to prove the Japs' undoing. The narrow mind and sheer stupidity of Katetu and of his masters who had taught him how to fight, wasted the immense courage and skill of his soldiers. But for the moment, as I say, I did not know this, and I advised the C.O. that we still had only one regiment against us and that the other two must be operating against Dimapur.

After we had sorted this matter out to nobody's liking, we spent the rest of the day going the rounds and taking what rest we could. Then at dusk, down came another fearful bombardment, fiercer even than the one of the night before. Soon afterwards the sounds of small arms fighting came, through the crashing of the shells, from the direction of the D.C.'s bungalow. We waited a while, hoping for some report of its intensity and, as we expected, it came, though not over the wireless but in the shape of a sweating, bedraggled Gurkha. He hurried past Heffernan who, as usual, was on guard just above us, and came smartly to attention the moment he found himself in the command post. Before he started speaking, he gave an immaculate salute and then said in broken English, "Many dushman come in all sides. Jemadar Sahib send me say all O.K. and he fight like he know how." He then lapsed into an embarrassed silence and fingered his rifle nervously.

John said, "Take him along, Willie, and find out what the form is." I went out into the night guided by the Gurkha, but even as I left I heard Tommy Kenyon's voice coming over the wireless; there was no mistaking its crisp and forthright tone. He said, "Am being attacked by enemy who have gained a footing on end of I.G.H. Spur. Enemy too near for supporting fire to be effective. Am in good positions here and can. . . ." I looked round at the two officers. John was sitting quite calmly at the set, methodically putting away the information in his head and assessing the danger at one end of his front against the danger at the other. Douglas was taking notes.

The situation down at the D.C.'s bungalow was terribly confused and for two hours I could make little of it. I felt quite useless because I did not know the name of any of the British

soldiers who were fighting—I had not had time to visit or learn to know them—while as for the Gurkhas and the few men of Assam who were with them—I could not even speak their language. The whole command seemed to rest on the shoulders of a Gurkha Jemadar and he was handling his mixed force with consummate skill and with a daring typical of the Gurkha soldier. But even his efforts, and those of the brave men fighting under him, could not hold back the mass of the enemy who attacked in yelling, screaming waves. After a time I became aware that, step by step, we were retreating. Soon the enemy were in the bungalow itself and started advancing in hundreds across the lovely gardens and up to the tennis-court where the two sides became locked together, fighting hand-to-hand. By superhuman effort the horde was stopped on the edge of the court, and the fighting died down.

Immediately the Jemadar checked his men and came to tell me that there were very few left. I advised the C.O. on my wireless that reinforcements were needed, so at first light he sent down Sergeant Brooks with a platoon from 'A' Company and quickly, before the mist rose and revealed his coming, the sergeant took up his position a little to the right of the tennis-court. When the new platoon was well dug-in the Jemadar withdrew his soldiers; as they fell back, so the Japs moved up until they reached the far edge of the court. There Sergeant Brooks and his men stopped them with a wall of fire. The Japs were left on one side of the tennis-court, with Sergeant Brooks and his men on the other. For the rest of the battle they played against each other, but the balls they were using were grenades and these were followed by bullets and shells whenever anyone on either side moved, so that after a while, because the ground in those lovely gardens was open, movement became impossible by day on either side of the court. It was only by night that the enemy could reinforce their grip on the bungalow and the spur on which it was built, and it was only by night that our men could improve their trenches, build their head cover and have food brought to them.

It was on this night that we took our first step backwards, down there by the bungalow. It was the first of many, but for each backward step we saw, to it that the Japs paid a high price for the ground they gained.

The fighting on this and the previous night created special

problems for John Young. He watched the wounded being carried into his dressing station all day and even while they were being laid out, the worst hit in the trenches already dug and the remainder, for whom there was no accommodation, on the open ground, the dressing station was under constant fire. John's main concern was to have holes dug for all of them, but because in this area the undergrowth and trees were now bare, digging could only take place in the dark.

As well as holes for the wounded he had to have an operating theatre underground, somewhere in which his doctors could work with comparative freedom from the fear of injury or death. So far he had not been able to carry out a single operation because there was nowhere where the surgeons could shelter under cover by day or show a light by night. He had set the digging in hand three nights before, but it was not until midnight on this same night that the operating theatre was finished. It was just five feet deep and was circular, with a diameter of ten feet. The medical stores were piled in three little trenches running off from the main theatre; there was a ramp leading into the centre down which to bring the wounded. Across the middle of the circle was a stretcher resting on trestles and this was the operating table. It was a modest effort and John would have liked something better, but just there, where the dressing station was situated, was only two feet of soil beneath it, rock and stone. He did what he could to conceal it with bushes and the doctors operated crouching down below the lip of the hole. If they had to operate at night, as later they did, the only light came from a carefully shielded hurricane lamp.

An even greater problem for the doctor was the shortage of blankets. At midnight he talked this problem over with the C.O. He said, "I must have more blankets for the dressing station. Shock cases are arriving in a constant stream and must be kept warm. If I can't keep them warm, I am going to lose them."

The C.O. replied, "Well, I don't know where you're going to get them from. The men have only one blanket each and I can't withdraw those. They're getting little enough sleep as it is and those who do get a chance of resting at night must have some protection against the cold."

The doctor said, "If you'll give me the 'go ahead' I think

I can get some. There are half a dozen trucks on the roadside about five hundred yards beyond the D.C.'s bungalow. From up on the spur I can see right down into the back of one of them and it's stack full of blankets. Why the Japs haven't taken them yet, I can't imagine, but if they don't want them, we do. I think I ought to go and get them."

"All right! You go, but you're not to get involved in any fighting because I want you back here. You're more important than a million blankets."

The doctor answered, "I suggest the best way to avoid fighting is to go unarmed. I have ten stretcher-bearers lined up outside who have volunteered to go with me. All we want is a word from you."

"Well, I don't like it. Those trucks are right in the middle of the Jap lines and there's fighting going on round the D.C.'s bungalow now."

The doctor said, "It's the fighting that will give me a good chance, because the Japs will be concentrating on that and will hardly worry about a spare doctor wandering about among them."

John thought this an optimistic outlook but he gave permission and the doctor went out and collected his men.

They dropped down on to the road two hundred yards to the south-west of the bungalow, then scurried across in groups until they were all safely in the jungle on the far side. The ground dropped steeply away here and the doctor's plan was to go some way down into the nullah and then climb up on to the road again opposite the trucks. The men moved slowly through the jungle, stopping every five minutes to listen. Several times, when they were halted, they heard parties of the enemy moving up through the forest to join the battle. One of these passed only two yards away, but so intent were they on the battle raging ahead that they took no notice of the doctor and his stretcher-bearers.

They came up to the road exactly as planned and as the doctor drew his head up on to the level of the road, he saw the six trucks outlined against the dark sky no more than ten yards away. Then, while he waited, the other men moved silently up beside him until they were all in a line at the edge of the road. They stood still and silent, for ten, fifteen, twenty minutes, listening into the dark, and it was as well that they did so

because the doctor's keen ears soon became aware of the soft padding of feet on the tarmac moving regularly, up and down. He thought there was only one man there in charge of the trucks and, because he was a Japanese, his beat was of exactly the same length each time he marched up and down it; he turned almost on the same spot at each end.

All this the doctor discovered by listening, because it was too dark for him to see the man against the background of the trucks and he could not bring his head down low enough to silhouette him against the sky. He decided to silence this man before raiding the trucks, so when the feet began padding away from him, he whispered quickly to the man next to him to stay where he was and heaved himself up on to the road. He dragged himself forward to a spot where the sounds told him the sentry would turn and lay in the road, waiting. The feet padded back towards him. When they were only two yards away the doctor jumped to his feet and stretched out his arms while the Jap walked straight into him. During those two vital seconds when the man was recovering from surprise, John felt for his shoulder and then his neck and smashed his fist into the man's face. The Jap gave a sharp grunt and fell to the ground. The doctor went down after him and, feeling over his body again, found his jaw and hit it hard. He knew exactly where to hit, so that the man's body went slack beneath his hands. He picked him up and dropped him over the edge of the road into the jungle. The body rolled down a few feet before coming to rest.

John Young gave a low whistle and the ten stretcher-bearers swarmed across the road and into the trucks. Quickly they grabbed the blankets and spilled them into the road. They picked up all they could carry and staggered off with the great bundles into the jungle. It was not so easy going back, for each man was carrying fifteen or twenty blankets and they were both bulky and heavy. For two hours they tripped and fell, dragged themselves upright and struggled on through the pitch blackness and dense undergrowth until at last they were climbing up over the road again into their own lines. Finally they reached the dressing station, all exhausted, but they had the blankets which the doctor needed.

While Colonel Young was getting his blankets, and while I was looking on helplessly at the confused fighting round the D.C.'s bungalow, events were piling up on the C.O. in the

command post. No sooner had the doctor left than the sound of fighting came from the D.I.S. Feature and the C.O. knew that Tom's men, as they were now, were in trouble again. Tom Coath, a large and cheerful youth, with his red complexion heightened by a dark jowl, took over command of 'C' Company when Bobby was wounded. Tom was immensely popular with men and officers alike and, withal had a strong frame and a shrewd mind.

He reported from time to time that he was able to cope with the situation, but that the pressure was becoming heavier. There was nothing the C.O. could do to help because he could not at that moment reinforce any part of his front. The only reinforcements were John Winstanley and his 'B' Company on Kuki Picquet, who had not yet been heavily engaged, and the two remaining platoons of 'A' Company still on I.G.H. Spur. Of these, the latter were liable to be engaged at any minute, whereas the former were holding a vital position should the D.I.S. and F.S.D. features fall. He kept his fingers crossed for the tired and weak 'C' Company.

A little later Peter Franklin came to see him. He said, "I'm afraid the water's gone. As you know, we've been expecting it at any minute and I'm surprised they haven't cut it off sooner. I reckon we've got enough stored away now for a week's use at half a pint per man per day."

The C.O. said, "All right, put the men on that ration right away and you personally supervise the rationing. Have you done anything about finding another water point?"

Peter said, "Yes, there is one other, but it's damned difficult to get at. I was looking round the D.C.'s bungalow and there's a trickle coming out of the ground about a hundred and fifty yards this side of it. It's only just above the road and while I was having a look at it, the Japs started potting at me from the other side. As far as I could discover, they are not more than thirty yards away on the far side of the road. I'm afraid we can only use it in the dark and I've organized companies to send parties with containers each night."

John said, "Will this give us enough to put up the ration above the half-pint per day?"

Peter replied, "No! Anything from that source we'll have to consider a bonus for use in the dressing station; they'll need every drop they can get. There is one other source, the rain.

We must have some soon because the monsoon is on the way; it seems odd we haven't had any during the last five days. Colonel Lander and that boy, Wright, have been at work on that one. His chaps have dug in two or three canvas tanks which are full at the moment and we hope that as they empty out the rain will fill them up. It won't give us enough to plan on, though.

"Those sappers, by the way, get through an incredible amount of work; they never stop. They suggest that when it does rain, the men should put out their tin hats and catch it. Sounds a good idea to me."

The C.O. said, "They can do that in the daytime—it's a fair risk then—but on no account are tin hats to be used at night; they must be worn."

The water ration was to remain at half a pint per man per day for the rest of the battle. It was far from enough, for the days were hot and the men sweated profusely from ten in the morning until five in the evening, while the doctor had only enough for the most urgent medical purposes. From that moment on there were many wounded who suffered from lack of water; most of them suffered in silence, but not all.

So John Lavery had many things on his mind. He was being heavily attacked on three sides of his small perimeter: he had virtually no reinforcements with which to bolster up any one of these fronts. His dressing station was full to overflowing while his doctor, John Young, the man on whom he leaned so heavily, was out there among the Japs, collecting blankets so essential to the shock cases. His water supply had gone and he had to restrict his men to a ration which, after a few days, would test their endurance to the limit. There was no sign of help coming from outside except from Yeo's guns. He had no idea of how much longer he must hold on.

As I crawled into the command post at dawn, I found him asleep with his head resting on the wireless set. He was wearing the earphones and the microphone had slipped from his hand to the ground. Douglas explained that he had fallen asleep while sending a message to Brigade and that he, Douglas, had sent the last part of the message. But as soon as I came in he was awake and alert, asking for my report of the shambles down at the bungalow. I told him what had happened during the night. As soon as I finished he was on his feet and dragging

me round the company positions. Although he was dead tired and overloaded with responsibility, he had a cheerful word for every man; and the men, who liked to see him, felt better for his coming.

On the way over Kuki Picquet we stopped to have a word with 'the man in the hole'. The hole was three feet deeper than when we had last seen it, and the disconsolate figure was hunched up at the bottom. John asked him how he was faring and the theme of his answer was the same as when we last spoke to him—"I must get out of here; I must get back to Calcutta."

As we walked away we saw an Indian soldier crawl up to the edge of the hole and lower the man his breakfast. The Indian waited for the breakfast to be eaten and then collected the container to take it away and clean it ready for the next meal. Before he left the Indian came to his feet and saluted. John turned to me and said, "Christ! Some men would be better dead." We walked off and were ashamed.

Once again the day passed quietly. The C.O. ordered an attack to try to clear the D.C.'s bungalow, but with little success. We had only a few carriers and they made the attack with a platoon of 'A' Company and a hastily gathered platoon of Gurkhas. They were supported by mortars and by Yeo's guns which had now moved up so they could reach the east side of the defences. Mixed forces are of little value unless properly rehearsed and the attack failed due to the stubborn defence of the Japanese. Later on in the day the other two platoons in 'A' Company moved down to join Sergeant Brooks and his men on the edge of the tennis-court and took up positions round the bungalow area. Their positions on I.G.H. Spur were filled by men from Battalion Headquarters and the platoon of the Indian Sappers. The C.O. made other minor adjustments on the perimeter but try as they would, he and Douglas could find no way of relieving Tom's men on the D.I.S. Spur because of the serious threat that was coming from the bungalow area. As dusk fell he sent them a few more reinforcements of men from the convalescent depot.

As usual, there was intermittent shelling and mortaring throughout the day. Amid the gunfire and the din of battle Padre Randolph held a service in the dressing station. It was a short service and there were only twelve men in the congregation, but some of the wounded could hear them as they spoke

the prayers and the hymns. I called in there as the service was drawing to a close and the hymn they were saying was, 'Christ the Lord has risen today, Hallelujah', for it was Easter Sunday, 9th April, 1944, the fifth day of the siege. The glorious tune and the words, full of hope, ran through my head as I walked slowly back to the command post, but as soon as I was inside the words seemed to hold little meaning, for the gladness of Easter was not there and the mercy of God had deserted us, so it seemed. It was only when I looked into John's face and saw the strength of the man's spirit looking out that my faith was revived a little, for surely that spirit which could lead men beyond the limit of endurance, even through the agony of the shadow of death, and keep them steady, was not of man's making. So I drew strength from the padre and the few men worshipping with him, and again from John, and I believe that the men in the dressing station, and the tired men crouched low in their slit trenches on the perimeter, did so too.

If the C O had his problems on that Easter Sunday, so did Colour Sergeant Jack Eves. He was a great lump of a man, red faced, broad shouldered, with great thick legs. The war found him working happily on a farm, a big farm, and had taken him away and made a soldier of him. He had been with the battalion since it went overseas in 1940. At one time they had made him a Regimental Policeman because of his size, because he was useful with his hands and because he played left back in the Regimental soccer team and was its captain. But policing did not suit him and he was soon back in one of the fighting companies.

As a Colour Sergeant his main worry was food, and on this Easter Sunday he had somehow to take a hot meal out to his men in the trenches near the Japanese. He was a conscientious man and was for ever thinking up new ways of serving the monotonous diet. For their evening meal on this special day he flavoured the bully beef with sardines and added to them dehydrated potatoes. The potatoes were a problem because they needed water to make them edible and he had not enough water. He was also short of cooks. He started the battle with four, but two had already been picked off by snipers while carrying the food out to the men on the perimeter. The two remaining were hard pressed to collect the wood, keep the fires burning and cook under primitive conditions for nearly a

hundred men, but between them he and the two cooks produced two hot meals a day, at least for the first week of the battle. To make this Easter meal really tasty they mixed three tins of margarine with the dehydrated potatoes.

At four-thirty in the evening, before the evening hate started, they took the food round to the men. Colour Sergeant Eves liked the regular habits of the Japs; the evening hate started exactly on time every day, so that he could calculate to a minute when he had to start issuing the food. The two cooks each carried two dixies, one with the stew in and the other full of the potatoes flavoured with margarine. The Colour Sergeant followed with two more dixies full of tea. They staggered down towards the men in the front lines, dodging from bush to bush and tree to tree, taking what cover they could from the shelling and the sniping. They went first to the men nearest the enemy; men overlooked from only forty yards away by the Japs on Jail Hill. They crawled forward the last forty yards or so, pushing one dixie each in front of them, though this was not easy because the dixies were heavy and were still hot from the fire. When they reached a slit trench the two soldiers crouching inside held up their mess tins and the cook ladled the stew and potatoes into one while the Colour Sergeant poured a little tea into the other. There was just enough water to allow each man two mouthfuls of tea. When they had fed the men in one slit trench they crawled along to the next one and then to the next, until they had fed a whole section. They then returned to collect the three dixies they had left behind and carried them off towards the next section. It took the Colour Sergeant and his two cooks one hour, if they were lucky, to complete the company positions; for the men who fed last, those in the headquarters' post, the meal was not so hot. If they were not lucky, it took more than an hour and they had to find their way back through the evening hate. But Colour Sergeant Eves, the Regimental football team's left back, was not aware of the danger, or, if he was, no one knew it. On this evening, as he poured two mouthfuls of tea for the last section post, one of the men said, "Special dinner tonight, Colours; what's the do?"

The Colour Sergeant said, "Easter Sunday today, my boy. Sorry there weren't no pink eggs for breakfast." He had forgotten when he last saw an egg.

The Tennis-court

EASTER DAY drew to a close with storm clouds gathering on the mountains. Private Culmer, from a slit trench on the edge of the tennis-court, watched them piling high, one on the other, and rolling slowly nearer across the valley. They were dark, ominous and heavy with rain. Before the clouds came the wind, at first a mere rustling in the tree tops where there had been no rustling before, then a hot breeze, growing in strength until the trees were bending before it. Private Culmer knew, as did all the men, that streaks of lightning would soon be flashing across the valleys from hill to hill; that a mighty crash of thunder would relieve the clouds of their heavy load and that the rain would pour down in a steel-grey sheet. He was not sorry, because his lips were dry and his throat parched by lack of water; he could not look beyond his first drink to the misery of a cold and sleepless night, soaked to the skin, with the water in the trench slowly creeping higher and higher up his legs.

He, and the men around him, laid out their tin helmets on the ground, hoping the storm would break while it was still daylight and before the Japs attacked. Some of the soldiers crawled over to empty trenches nearby, trenches which only a few hours before had held their friends, and laid in them strips of canvas, or ground sheets, or anything they could lay hands on which might hold water; then they waited for the storm to break.

Private Culmer was an old member of the unit, but one day, long ago, he had been lost in the desert and it had taken some time to find him. He rejoined us at Dimapur, just before the move up to Kohima, and, as is the custom with men who disappear without reason in battle, he was placed under close

arrest and handed over to the commander of 'A' Company. Tommy thought that the Army regulations for holding a man under close arrest might well be waived in Kohima, so he let the man free to take his part in the battle. Culmer arrived on the edge of the tennis-court with Sergeant Brooks's platoon. There he found a number of British soldiers from the convalescent depot who had been fighting hard all the previous night and were wandering aimlessly looking for someone to lead them. Culmer collected them, appointed himself their section leader and commanded them for the rest of the battle.

One of these men, Ginger Purdey, shared Culmer's trench. They watched the storm roll in over the mountains while the light faded from the sky, staring first at the clouds and then across the tennis-court. Though the storm and the water it would bring were uppermost in their thoughts, they had to keep an eye on the other side of the court because the Japs might be forming up for an attack in the dead ground beyond. The two men knew that it was dangerous to let the Japs gather unmolested because the dead ground was only thirty yards away and thirty yards gives little time to break up a well-ordered attack. So, taking turns, they watched for movement, and listened for some sound of the Japanese collecting there.

If they saw anything they would report back to Sergeant Brooks who would ask for fire to be brought down. Yeo would receive the call and within seconds the screw guns would be firing into the crowd of enemy. As the two men watched their eyes hurt because they had had only ten hours' sleep in the last five days. After a while, Purdey's head began to nod and Culmer said, "Right'o Ginge, try an' git a bit of kip in: you might git a few minutes if you're lucky." Ginger slid down into the trench until his head was below the edge and went to sleep.

As Private Culmer turned back he saw a soldier climb up on to the far side of the court and start running across it. He ran blindly towards Culmer, with his head down and his arms flailing, as though they might drive his legs faster across that open space. As he came, the Japs fired, snipers mostly, from the bungalow building, but none of them hit him. He dived flat into cover near Culmer's trench and Culmer shouted, "Over 'ere, mate, quick." The soldier crawled over and fell into the trench, and they had to squeeze up to make room for

him, so that Ginger was woken. Culmer said, "Where the 'ell 'ave you been, chum?"

The soldier said, "Christ almighty! You should ask! I've been among them yellor bastards."

Culmer said, "'Ow come?"

The soldier told his story in fits and starts while the evening hate started and the other men looked out into the gathering gloom.

"Them bastards come up the other side of the bungalow last evenin'. They don't do much like, 'cept creep up on us, cut me section off and, after a bit of a scrap, kills all me muckers 'cept one who was in the same 'ole as me. Japs reckoned they'd 'ad it for a bit, so they waits around till dark and starts taking the place over proper. Thahsands of 'em starts creeping up the 'ill and collecting there just below, though you couldn't see 'em from 'ere. They finds me and me mate, a bloke called Shortie Soames, and we lies doggo, but old Shortie must 'ave moved or somethin', 'cause they got 'im—shot the guts out o' the poor sod. I thought I'd 'ad me chips then, but I 'adn't, and I lies there all night with poor old Shortie bleeding all over me.

"Meanwhile the bastards start setting up a couple o' machine guns right alongside. They dumps the ammo on top of old Shortie—what was left of 'im—and they was treading all over 'im and me, just like we wasn't there. After a bit they get these 'ere machine guns in place and that night they uses them when they puts in their attack. It was a fair sight, that was, 'cause the Japs 'ad forgotten about me, and so 'ad you blokes, and your bullets were whipping around and then the shells come down. It's them guns what broke up the Jap attack, no doubt. They was bang on they was and I was fair chuffed to be at the bottom of that there 'ole.

"When the shooting was over the Japs 'ad gone past me a bit, so I lays there all today, nice and quiet like, until about a couple of hours ago more of the bastards starts milling around. They put some more ammo on the dump on top of Shortie and I starts getting real scared then. I reckons there was too many of 'em mucking about there for the good of me and if I don't 'op it quick they wouldn't wait till dark to stick me guts out. So I 'opped it and 'ere I am."

Culmer said, "Christ! You ain't 'alf been through it, mate.

You'd better get back to old Brookie, 'e's our platoon sergeant bloke, and tell 'im what you know. And look 'ere, if 'e don't want to keep you, you come back and join my mob. I got a good lot of lads."

The private crawled off to find old Brookie. Culmer looked back across the court and Ginger settled down for another kip. The clouds were over the valley now, piling up in heavy black layers over their heads. The wind had gone and the air was deathly still, the light grey and menacing. Silence lasted for some twenty minutes, while Culmer's tired eyes roamed over the gardens round the D.C.'s bungalow, now a Japanese stronghold. Both sides waited.

Culmer began to feel lonely sitting in the half light by himself, so he nudged his friend saying, "Wake up, Ginge, they'll be coming soon." Ginger hoisted himself up until his head was over the parapet and the two friends were side by side, just touching each other, still waiting. Culmer said, "It ain't half quiet, ain't it?"

Ginger said, "Not a sound, nowhere; there's plenty a-coming, though."

Culmer said, "Look here, Ginge, I don't know much about you blokes; where d'yer come from, back in Blighty?"

Ginger answered, "Me Dad's got a little place in Tenterden—we're farming blokes really."

"Cor, dunno 'ow you country blokes do it. I wouldn't swap the 'ole of your place for a couple of square foot of the Old Kent Road."

"Do get a bit dull at times, I s'pose, but we plods on. Trouble with you city men is you're always in too much of a rush. Don't know where you think it's getting you."

"Well, I guess you got to live where you find yerself. Maybe I'll come an' look you up when this lot's over."

Ginger said, "I'd like that, and so would me Dad."

Then the two men heard the screaming over their right shoulders and the sound of grenade and small arms fire. Culmer said, "That's poor old Charlie Company; must be getting another pasting."

Ginger answered, "It'll be our turn next. Can't make it out really, what we're all doing fighting away for this ruddy piece of jungle—don't mean nothing to me."

Culmer said, "Nothink else we can do; we're 'ere and them

yeller bastards are out there. They're not going to let us out and if we pack it up they'll bayonet the lot of us. Anyway, it's what old Texan Dan says we got to do. 'E's our C.O., and 'e knows best. 'E's got guts, that bloke—cool as ice. 'Ad to go up to 'is place yesterday and he was sitting there like he might be in the Odeon round the corner, watching a flick. Don't see much of him, but you know 'e's there all the time and while 'e's there, you can't go wrong."

Ginger said, "Suppose that's it," and they relapsed into silence and listened to Charlie Company getting their pasting. All at once a great flash of lightning rent the gloom and, as the thunder roared out and reverberated over the valley and over the great mountains, the rain came, falling in a solid sheet, crashing through the tree tops, battering down on the men's heads and shoulders, soaking them through. With the storm came the fearful noise of the artillery barrage, round after round fired direct into their positions from the hills facing them. The men quickly grabbed their tin hats and put them on, ready for the attack which they knew must come. There was deafening din all round them now, with the rain battering on the ground, the Jap shells bursting among them and the shells of the mountain guns hurtling into the enemy forming up thirty yards away on the other side of the tennis-court.

Though they still stared, the two men could see very little, only half way across the court, because of the sheet of rain. Culmer shouted, "This is it," and put the butt of his Bren to his shoulder, pointing the barrel across the court. He knew the Japs would come that way—they had come that way the night before and even that morning, in broad daylight. It had taken him only a few days to learn that the Japs were men of habit. Then, almost before they knew it, the grenades were falling among them and the enemy were swarming across the court. They came in waves so that there seemed to be thousands of them, a host of vague shadows moving quickly towards them through the wet shining curtain. The front wave of the ghost-like host stopped midway across the court, crouched low and hurled grenades forward among the men who were waiting for them. While the grenades were falling, Culmer fired his Bren and Ginger, between loading it with magazines, fired his rifle. The front wave came right up to the edge of the trenches where Culmer's men were fighting back and as it reached

them, it stopped; the Japs waived, wondering which way to go, and while they hesitated, Culmer's men shot them down one by one until there were none left. The second wave was already ragged by the time it reached them because Yeo's guns had fired in among them so that they, too, were dealt with by the cross fire from machine guns and rifles and by the grenades which Culmer's men were hurling across the court.

Then, when the din from the rain and the shells, from the grenades and small arms fire, was at its highest pitch, Sergeant Brooks appeared at Culmer's elbow. It was quite dark by now, so that Culmer knew he was there only when the sergeant shouted in his right ear, "How's your ammo, Culmer?"

It was Ginger who yelled back, "Only 'alf a dozen mags left: we'll need some more."

The sergeant shouted, "I'll get some down."

Then, in a brief lull, Culmer said, "How are we doing, Sarge?"

The sergeant answered, "F——g awful, there's thousands of the yellow swine and down the other end they're pushing us back. You two just hold on here and no mistake; there's nothing for you to fall back on except old Texan Dan in his dug-out, and you wouldn't want no harm to come to him. I've sent for the rest of the company—they'll be down any minute. Here, take a couple of these. I'll fetch some more down later." He slung two full Bren magazines into the trench.

As he was leaving the crump of mortar bombs could be heard above the burst of the artillery shells and the drumming of the rain. Brooks said, "Good old Jobber, he was a fair bastard when he took them mortars over, spouting the bloody book like a bloody Regular, but, by God, he can handle them." And Culmer, between firing his Bren and cursing at Ginger for fumbling the magazines, shouted, "Good old Jobber," though he had never before heard of Sergeant King. Sergeant Brooks disappeared through the darkness and the rain, squelching his way over to see how the rest of his hard-pressed men were faring.

Meanwhile Culmer went on firing his Bren at target after target as each appeared only a few yards away in the darkness. He fired until his barrel was red hot then shouted, "New barrel, Ginge, quick!" There was no answer and he shouted again, "Hey Ginge Change this bloody barrel. Christ, man,

what's the matter with you? The bloody thing's melting." Still there was no answer. He took hold of the man's shoulders and twisted him round until they were face to face. "Come on, Ginge," he said, "wake up boy." The only answer was a rattling cough deep down in the man's chest and a spout of warm blood showering his face. He let Ginger drop back and he thought, 'By God, I forgot to ask where that little place in Tenterden was.'

Then he found the spare barrel, changed it himself and went on firing. Soon he began to feel the pressure weakening, the Japs were coming at him now only singly instead of in groups of four or five. Then he found he was firing his Bren only once every six or seven minutes. After a while he became aware that other soldiers were moving round him and instead of yelling and screaming in a peculiar sing-song voice, they were swearing and cursing in a language he understood perfectly. He assumed that the rest of the company had come down and restored the situation at the other end where the pressure had been even greater than that on his own section. Then, at last, the shelling stopped and there was quiet all round except for the patter of rain, now lighter than before, and the distant sounds of scattered firing over his right shoulder. He thought, 'Charlie Company's still copping it, poor sods.'

He took the barrel off his Bren and, fumbling with his pull-through, pushed the weighted end down the barrel and pulled it through twice with a strip of four-by-two. He picked up an oil can and poured the oil down the barrel saying, "That will have to do for you tonight, old girl." He put the barrel back on the gun. Then he leaned back against the sharp stony side of the slit trench, listening to the cries of the wounded lying out on the tennis-court and thinking, 'There won't be any of our boys out there.'

After a while he heard a deep gurgling just beside him, so he cushioned Ginger's head in his arm and said, "Come on, boy, how are you feeling?" But there was no answer. He put his hand on the man's heart and felt the last feeble flicker of life fading away. He left him there—there was no point in moving him for the time being. What was more important was that he should get more ammunition for the old girl.

He crawled back towards where he thought his platoon headquarters ought to be. When he thought he was safe, he

walked upright, through the mud, hoping he was going in the right direction. Soon he bumped into a body and a sharp authoritative voice said, "Who's that? What the hell are you doing?"

Culmer answered, "Bit jumpy, aren't you, Sergeant-Major? It's me, Culmer, what have you been up to?"

"Just cleared a whole lot of the bastards out from a hut. Bit of a do, that was: wouldn't have known they were there unless they hadn't shunted the furniture about while I was picking up grenades from outside. It was them bastards what was jumpy when I got in among them."

"Well, I've cleared a lot of the bastards off of the tennis-court and I knew they was there because they were screaming their bloody 'eads off. Got a spot of ammo?"

The sergeant-major said, "I got plenty. Come over 'ere."

He led the way to a pile of boxes stacked under a tree and Culmer filled his pouches with magazines; then, carrying as many as he could in his hands, he squelched his way back to his trench and settled down beside his friend's dead body to wait for the next attack. He waited all night but the attack never came. At dawn they took Ginger away and put another man in his place.

Texan Dan spent the night as usual on the wireless set in the command post while reports came in from all sides. Tommy Kenyon reported, in his sharp, decisive manner, that one of his platoons had been driven back and that he had had to use another platoon to restore the situation. Tommy was not in need of help, he seldom was.

An officer with the Assam Rifles reported. His men, in spite of their exhaustion after the desperate march back from the Chindwin, had now to be put out on to the perimeter on I.G.H. Spur. The officer's reports were confused, indecisive—he was not quite sure what was going on in the darkness, and in the storm, on the far end of the spur where it dropped away so steeply to the road below. He knew only that the Japs had some sort of a footing and that his men were holding them back only by grim hand-to-hand fighting. One other thing this officer reported: he had taken the documents off a dead Jap and they showed that he belonged to the 138th Regiment. This was the second regiment of the Japanese 31st Division now against us. I made a note of this item and started calculating.

From Tom, down with 'C' Company on D.I.S. Ridge, the reports were disturbing. He was thoroughly roused and was fighting the battle in a way to be expected of a man who had played rugger for the great Sidcup side before the war swept him up. He was putting everything he had into it and his methods were straightforward, as were his reports. Casualties were being carried off the field one by one; his side was weakening in numbers, while the opposition were using substitutes by the score, fresh men for each attack. A few men in his reserve positions were able to drive them back whenever they broke clean through, but on their way out they were able to take cover in trenches which had previously been occupied by Tom's men but were now empty, or half filled with dead.

During the last three hours of the night his men could do little but shoot now and then at the Jap nearest them—sometimes only five yards away in a trench which perhaps they themselves had dug. Meanwhile, Tom's men were losing ground; his *scrum* was slowly being pushed back by the sheer weight of the opposition, so that by dawn their position was precarious. Tom could not tell the whole of his story in one transmission, but we pieced it together from the short statements he issued from time to time between urging his men on to greater efforts and himself joining the fray where it was being hardest fought.

The C.O. crouched beside the set all night, weighing up each report, balancing one threat against another and preparing for the decisions which he knew he must give in the morning, decisions which would mean success or failure, life or death. He spoke very little.

At midnight Sergeant Strange came in with tea, three mugs on a tray, all full; we had not seen a full mug of tea for a long time. The C.O. asked the sergeant where he found the water and the sergeant said, "I collected it in my tin hat, sir, scooped it up off the ground, so to speak."

The C.O. commented, "You're supposed to wear your tin hat at night, Sergeant."

The gentleman's gentleman answered, "Excuse me, sir, but the opportunity seemed too good to miss; the rain falling out of the sky almost like a gift from God, sir."

Then we noticed the sergeant's beard which, in only four days, had grown almost half an inch and was neatly trimmed.

The C.O. said, "Where did you get that beard, sergeant?"

He answered, "If you'll pardon me, sir, when I heard you officers were holding a competition I thought it was up to me to set a good example." I looked round then at John's stubble, soon to turn into a neat imperial, a perfect fit for his narrow, pointed face; at Douglas's beard, already shaping into a fierce red bush. I fingered my own miserable mouse-coloured thing, as yet without shape at all. I felt it was going to be a close thing between John's imperial and his adjutant's piratical bush, but there was time yet, and there were John Young and Peter to be catered for; they had both started well.

Long before dawn John asked Douglas for the strength state. Douglas told him that both 'C' and 'D' Companies were now seriously short of men; about fifty per cent had been killed or wounded since they had come into Kohima and even then they had not been fully up to strength. 'B' Company had never recovered from that disastrous day in the Arakan, above the tunnels, when our own artillery had destroyed eighty out of a hundred and twenty men. All they had were the remainder of that hundred and twenty and a small draft of men picked up in Dimapur on the way, men who had been destined for the South Wales Borderers and were now fighting as well as Welshmen will anywhere shoulder to shoulder with men of Kent. John Winstanley thought the world of these men, but they were so desperately few in number.

Only Tommy's 'A' Company was at reasonable strength, except for Sergeant Brooks's platoon which had lost a fair number in the fighting round the tennis-court. With these, of infantry, there were only two platoons of Rajput soldiers, some half hundred men of the Assam Rifles and Assam Regiment and the remaining fifty-odd British soldiers from the convalescent depot who had not already been thrown in to make up strength in our companies.

When you are holding a perimeter and you start running short of men there is only one thing to do, shorten it. But the problem was not as simple as that because we had so many men inside who needed protection, the Indian non-combatants and the wounded; the numbers were daily increasing. Before deciding whether or not to shorten the perimeter the C.O. called in John Young to ask his advice on the effect of bringing it in nearer the wounded. John described the situation in the

dressing station: "I've had a few big pits dug now in which most of the stretcher cases are lying, crowded up against each other though they have every kind of wound and disease. All other cases are lying about alone in slit trenches round the pits. The point is that as each batch of wounded come in, so the dressing station has to be enlarged to accept them. If the perimeter is drawn in there will be less room for expansion, yet the number of casualties increases each day. I have, of course, appreciated the tactical picture and see the need to shorten the perimeter. I think you could do this on to F.S.D. Ridge without placing the dressing station in jeopardy, but if the Japs take advantage of the withdrawal to capture Kuki Picquet, we've had it."

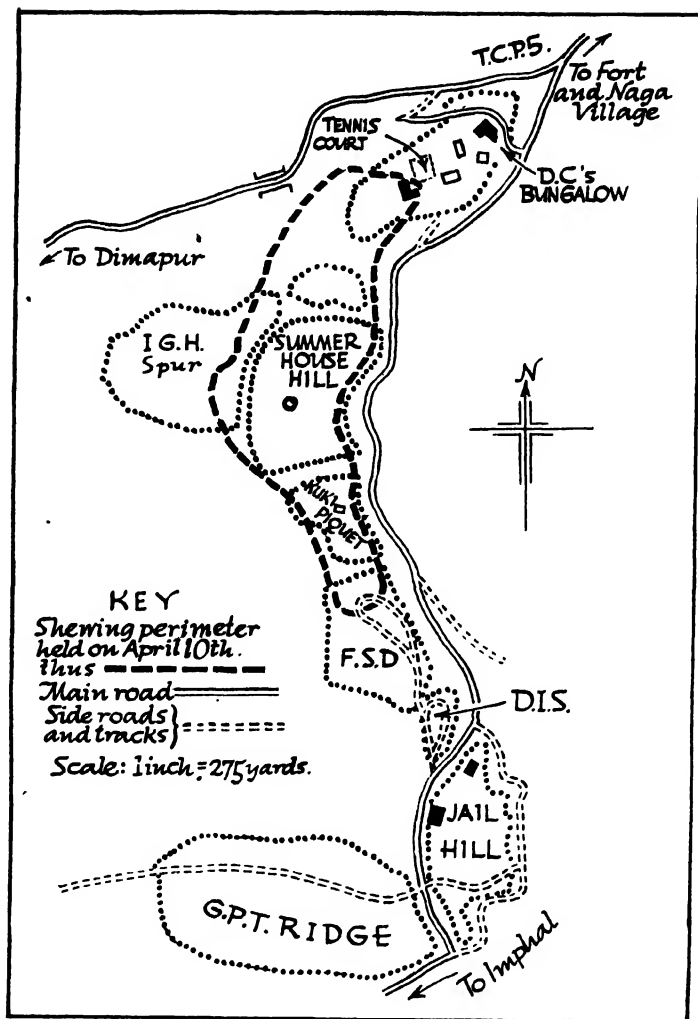
John Laverty thought for a while and then asked after Bobby Shaw. The doctor smiled and said, "His only grouse was the lack of depth of his trench, so, rather than dig it, we built it up with bags of atta and sugar—there are plenty lying around—he supervised this operation himself. His complaint now is that each time a shell falls nearby, quite a frequent occurrence, he is showered with the stuff from the bags. However, somebody usually manages to get round and brush it off during the course of the day."

John said, "What is wrong with him?"

The doctor answered, "Fractured femur. He's in a Thomas splint now, but he'll need an operation and the sooner the better. I can't do one here with the kit I've got, except as a matter of life or death."

He went away and the C.O. decided to withdraw 'C' Company on to the F.S.D. Feature, not that day but on the following night, because during the day there was work to be done. In the D.I.S. were stacks of stores still untouched, and these had to be destroyed. There were four scout cars parked among the buildings and these had to go too. The Japanese were to get nothing out of the withdrawal except a few yards of scrub-covered ground. Donald's men spent the day spiking tins of food and destroying the cases and pitching the four armoured cars down the steep precipice on the west side of the ridge.

We had also to reinforce the men on F.S.D. Ridge to make sure that Tom's company could withdraw safely through them. This we did with the two platoons of Rajput soldiers, placing them on the forward edge of the ridge so that they could hold



off the enemy whom we knew would fast follow up the withdrawal. It was going to be a difficult operation, this falling back, and we had to be sure that Tom's men had some strength behind them—some strong barrier to pass through. The Rajputs were to provide that barrier, with Donald's men reinforcing them from close behind. The Indians moved for-

ward during the day and took up positions side by side with our men in what was soon to become the front line.

The C.O. decided on these various courses of action at five o'clock in the morning and gave orders for them to be put into effect. By now the din of the night fighting had quietened down and the only sounds were the rain drumming on the roof and an occasional anguished cry from the dressing station on the other side of the Summer House Hill. It was cold in the command post, cold and damp, but in spite of this, Douglas and I dozed off leaving John hunched over the wireless set on listening watch. At dawn we were woken with the usual cry, "Top o' the morning to you, sirs." The call was jaggling on our nerves by now, but we said nothing; perhaps if we had put an end to it we would miss it; we would certainly offend Heffernan, and this was to be avoided at all costs. The whole matter seemed absurdly important, and Douglas and I talked it over at length before letting it rest.

Peter had started on a ditty on Private Heffernan, one of the Kohima ditties. There were many of these written during the fateful sixteen days, little doggerel rhymes, mostly based on pride in achievement and pride in the unit, but a few dealing with odd incidents of the battle. They were written with stub ends of pencil on any scrap of paper and were passed from section to section and trench to trench to give the men something to look at when they had time. Reading them now I can see that only one of them was good, the one handed to me on the last day of the battle, and none as funny, but in those days they were important. I never saw Peter's; perhaps he never found time to finish it.

There was no tea with reveille this morning, for what we had caught of the rain water was sent up to the dressing station. The doctor needed every ounce of water we could spare in order to save life and from this day on, the sixth day of the siege, water became so short that once the dressing station had been supplied, there was very little left for the men, not even the half pint to which they had been rationed when the regular supply was first cut off. From now on each man had only four mouthfuls to drink each day, if he was lucky.

I left the command post and walked over Summer House Hill and down I.G.H. Spur to collect the documents found on the Japanese during the night. The officer had them neatly

folded in a waterproof holder, with a rubber band round. I lay down on the ground and turned them over, one by one, studying them against my Japanese phrase book, until I found the identification the officer had reported, 138th Regiment. I folded them up again and put them in my tunic pocket resolving to ask Brigade about the movements of this regiment.

On the way back I stopped in to see Bobby, lying in his shallow trench with the bags of atta and sugar piled round him. He pointed out to me the Jap mortar positions on the hills, explaining how he could watch the crews put the bombs into the mortars and could then follow the trajectory of each bomb as it turned slowly over and over on its way up to the zenith of its flight. While he watched he was convinced that each bomb was coming down on to his own stomach until, at the last moment, it swung off and crumped down somewhere else. He tried at times not to look at them, but always, when the bombing started, his eyes were drawn out to the hills, to the short gleaming barrels and to the little men busy around them. There was little else for him to do.

He could speak to the men in the slit trenches immediately to his left and right, though he could not see them. These men were as badly wounded as he was, and in as great pain, and during the thirteen days and nights they lay there side by side he came to know them very well indeed. He had these men for company and, in addition, copies of *Romeo and Juliet* and of the Bible, which Padre Randolph had lent him to read. He found Shakespeare heavy going, but the Bible fascinated him.

There was a rusty old tin lying by his side which had once held tomatoes, and this was his lavatory, for one purpose only. There was no way of fulfilling the other need.

I asked him whether he knew how the battle was going and he said that Padre Randolph visited him each day, as indeed he did most men, both in the dressing station and on the perimeter, and kept him fully informed. The padre seemed to know exactly what was going on all the time; he knew what the men were thinking, and how they were feeling, and he had words of comfort for them all. The harder pressed they were, and the more dangerous their situation, the more often the padre visited them. Each time he came under fire he was desperately frightened, as all of us were, but not one man to whom he spoke was aware of it. He kept his fear bottled up

inside himself until he mastered it. His courage was immense, and all he met drew strength from it.

A few yards to Bobby's left was one of the communal pits in which the worst wounded were crowded. Bobby could hear every word spoken by the men in this pit; he could hear the pitiful crying of those who were in great pain but could not be drugged, because drugs were in short supply. Twice, during the previous three days, shells had burst in the pit and Bobby, once the initial shock of the explosion had worn off, heard the agonized screams for help and the grunting and cursing of the stretcher-bearers and digging parties as they separated the shattered bodies not yet dead from those which had been blasted to bits, and dug out the rubble to make space for more wounded. All round him, while he lay with his own pain racking his body, with nothing to occupy his mind except the Jap mortars and his Bible and the men next door, was the stench of blood and death and rotting wounds and the sounds of anguish. But all the time we were speaking he was smiling and cheerful. Before I left him I asked him why he kept a pistol on his chest. He said, "Oh! that's for me, in case the Japs get in." The pistol was there for thirteen days and thirteen nights, and so was the pain and the stench and the sounds; at any time he thought he might have to put the pistol to use.

After leaving him I passed several men from 'A' and 'B' Companies moving to and fro over the spurs leading down to the tennis-court and Kuki Picquet. I noticed their faces, every one terribly tired, for this was the sixth day of the siege and even in 'B' Company, which had not yet been directly attacked, they had had no more than four hours' sleep in every twenty-four, and those four hours in acute discomfort amid the din of battle. All faces were jaundiced, lined and haggard. Dirty stubbles of beard shadowed their chins, exaggerating the dark bags under their bloodshot eyes—eyes dulled with fatigue from staring into the gloom of the day, into the pitch darkness of night.

Life for them had resolved itself into only four requirements: clean weapons to fire when hordes of fresh enemy troops came at them; ammunition to fire through those weapons; water to relieve parched throats; and sleep. Of these four simple requirements, two were in desperately short supply: water and sleep. Even food meant nothing to them, for they knew what

each meal would be—bully beef from a tin and biscuits—dry biscuits delivered in paper packets marked 'W.D.' All were living on nervous energy and I wondered how long their store would last. We none of us knew how long it would be required to last, for there was no telling when help would arrive.

We heard first thing that morning that the 1st/1st Punjabis had at last joined the Rajput Battalion in the Jotsoma box. This box meant nothing to us except that it held the vital guns. We wanted to see one side of that box burst open, the side nearest Kohima, and we wanted to see the men inside pour out and up the road towards us and we wanted to see that done quickly. But we were told that the sides of the box were held firm by the enemy. The rest of the Brigade, besides holding the Jotsoma box, also had their eyes over their shoulders, back towards Dimapur and the Ledo Railway; towards Dimapur where a new division, the 2nd British Division, were arriving and had to be given time to deploy; towards the Ledo Railway, that vital link with Stilwell's Americans further north, still threatened by the Japanese 124th Regiment. There was no hope of quick relief, so when one or two of the tired men asked me how long it was all going to last, I was unable to give an answer.

Back in the command post I spoke to Brigade and they confirmed that the 138th Regiment were in battle against us. They had turned back from their drive on Dimapur through Pulomi and were now engaging us from the south and west. I passed on this news to the C.O. and he turned to Douglas saying, "What are the odds now?"

Douglas answered almost at once, "I make it that we have only five hundred fighting men left. Taking the strength of each Jap regiment at four thousand five hundred—they must have had some casualties though we can't possibly tell how many—this gives a total of nine thousand against five hundred—odds of eighteen to one. That makes your O.C.T.U. theories look a bit stupid, Willie."

I said, "Yes, that's true," while John said nothing. He was thinking about the new threat to I.G.H. Spur, wondering whether it was greater than that against the south side of the perimeter and whether he was wrong after all to shorten the line there. He argued the point with himself for most of the day,

but he did not change his mind and his orders were carried out that night.

The 10th of April passed quietly, except for the shelling and mortaring, but in the evening every gun, every mortar, every weapon the enemy had was turned on to us.

Saturated by Fire

THE main weight of the bombardment fell on Tommy's men. The whole of 'A' Company were now spread out among the trenches and dug-outs on the near side of the tennis-court. By this time the trenches were well dug, and some had overhead cover, as had all the dug-outs.

Tommy himself was in a slit trench, one of two which housed his company headquarters. He shared them with his corporal-signaller, his batman and Jones, a young boy with a sharp, mouse-like face and large, soft brown eyes. Tommy had brought this boy into his headquarters as a runner two days before because he was not bearing up well under the strain of siege. Worn down by the constant nervous strain, and with his own shell-shocked father's example before him, he was infecting the other men in his section with his own obsession. Jack Faulkner, his platoon commander, first took him under his wing until, in a moment of near hysteria, he threatened to shoot his own officer; then Tommy took him over. Wherever he went, the boy Jones went too, and whenever possible Tommy would give him some small mission to keep him occupied. It was of no use sending him to John Young for treatment, for there was no place to hold him in the dressing station, no cure to give him, no escape from the continuous shelling.

The four men looked out from the trenches, with their weapons pointing into the darkness, while shells from the quick-firing 75 mm. guns and heavy bombs from the three-inch mortars captured by the Japs crashed and crumped among the weapon pits and the dug-outs all round them. At each near-miss the thrust of the explosion came right into the trench, shaking their bodies and leaving them tingling. Great spouts of earth fell out from the sides, while stones and lumps of hot iron

flew overhead. When they heard the whine of flying iron the men ducked instinctively, although they knew it was too late.

Occasionally, as the bombardment roared and crashed overhead, Tommy left his place to crawl round his platoon positions, taking Jones with him. He had no orders to give his platoon commanders, for there was no manoeuvre for avoiding shells and bombs, but when he heard their voices he knew that they and their men were still there.

Jones's eyes were wide open—too wide—as he looked into the night, seeing nothing. Now and then, Tommy edged over and spoke to him, but the boy had no answer, except a little, frightened whimper. Though he gave him words of encouragement, he realized they were of little use for they were drowned by the noise and the danger outside. He could only hope that the boy would stand firm by the example of the others.

After the first hour of shelling, which seemed the whole night long, Tommy decided to visit his platoons again. He looked across at Jones, trying to decide whether or not to take the boy with him. He could see his face quite clearly in the flashes from exploding shells and in the light of the parachute flares which now and then burst open among the tree tops to float gracefully down on to the carnage. As he moved nearer he could himself feel the fear that was gripping the boy's mind and, for a moment, it seemed to be taking hold of his own. He said, quickly, "I'm going the rounds, Jones, come along."

Jones left his rifle on the parapet and crouched low in the trench. He started bawling, in hysterical falsetto, "I'm not coming—I can't—me dad had this—I got it, too. I'll shoot you first—I swear I will—I'll shoot you dead—I can't stand no more."

He reached for his rifle and swung it over towards his company commander, holding it with feeble hands. Tommy pushed it off to one side saying, "Don't be a fool, Jones. You don't want the Japs to get you, do you? If you shoot me it will be one shot nearer to the Japs over-running this place. You come on and do as I say and you'll be all right."

Jones dragged at his rifle and stood upright, breathing hard, his eyes swivelling from his officer's face to the flashes in the night outside and down to the hard ground at his feet. Tommy said, "Get down, until it's time to go," but at that moment there was a crash and a blinding flash nearby and the

boy's body was hurled half out of the trench. Tommy pulled him back in and ran his hands over the limp body to find that a shell splinter had torn a great hole in his shoulder. He patched up the wound as best he could with his own field dressing.

The bombardment continued, growing heavier as time went by. Now and then reports came to Tommy by runner of a slackening here on this platoon, or there on that, but over all the tempo increased. He answered each message, either by runner or by visit, telling them again and again to stay alert for the attack which must follow.

After two hours there was silence, sudden and complete. Tommy called over his corporal to tell him to arrange for Jones to be sent back to the dressing station. The corporal said, "Good f—g riddance. We don't want none of that sort 'ere." Tommy then took his batman and at once left the trench, to stumble once more round the platoon positions, trying to assess the effect of the bombardment on the men. The effect was severe. Many of them were still shaking physically, others were collapsed exhausted, others had left their weapons unguarded while they leant forward on the parapets, trying to draw strength from the feel of the hard earth. Tommy spoke to all of them, either to give words of encouragement where they were needed, or to give sharp orders to bring the men to. He knew them all, and as he identified them in the darkness he knew what treatment to give them. If he had not known he would not have been their leader.

Some of those he identified were dead, and some who were dead he could not identify; they were just messes of tangled flesh and bone. These he left where they were until someone could come out in daylight and clear them away, while Douglas might arrange for someone else to take their place. Others were wounded, and those too badly hurt to carry on fighting he sent back to the dressing station, either walking or carried by the few stretcher-bearers left to him.

The dead and wounded were easy to deal with, but the shell-shocked—no. He had heard much talk and read papers by the yard about psychiatric casualties, war neurosis, and all the other fancy names given to shell-shock cases. He had read how psycho-analysts probed to the root of these men's troubles and how psychiatrists cured them, but there were none of these up here in Kohima. The best he could do was to say the right

word to the right man, then leave that man, and the friend who was sharing the danger with him, to sort it out between themselves. In most cases he succeeded because he was a good leader.

His other problem was material. Broken weapons lay about in and around the trenches, weapons which could not be protected from bombardment because they had to be ready for immediate use. He was prepared for this problem—it had happened before—and his sergeant-major was already taking round replacements for these weapons from the small reserve. When he returned he would have to check with his sergeant-major how many were left in the reserve. At a rough reckoning he thought that there would be very few.

As he dealt with these problems there was a sense of urgency about all his movements. There was little time to think out what to say to his men; he had to know instinctively, and at once, because the Japanese did not put down a bombardment of this sort without planning to follow it up with a massed assault, and the follow-up usually came in very quickly. It was to guard against it that he was alerting his men. He completed his round and staggered back into his trench. There he waited, and waited, but no attack came. After a while he succumbed to the anti-climax and sat on the hard ground to rest, while his corporal stood on guard. They dozed the night away in two-hour stretches, he and his corporal taking turn to watch.

The bombardment fell also on the area forty yards wide and forty yards long between the command post and the dressing station. It consisted mainly of three-inch mortar bombs, fired through mortars made in England and captured by the Japanese when they swooped on the fort. As we sat in the command post listening to them crump overhead, I counted them. In the first twelve minutes one hundred bombs fell.

‘Tops’ Topham, our signals officer, who wrote so often to his young wife Elaine, was near the exit when the bombing started, and though he edged a little into the dug-out there was no room for him to move away from the exit while manning the rear-link wireless set which at that time was his duty. Nothing would drag ‘Tops’ away from his duty. Though a quiet and simple man, he was an extremely efficient signals officer. To us who knew him well it seemed that he had only two interests in life, his duty and his wife—there were times

when we thought he might break down under the strain of prolonged separation from her.

He stooped low, with the earphones on his head and the microphone in his hand, realizing the danger, but unable to avoid it. When the bombs had been raining down for some twenty minutes, shaking the dug-out and throwing in the earth and stones, a great splinter of cast-iron casing hurtled through the exit and struck him in the thigh. The force of the projectile and the explosion combined hurled him across the floor.

Douglas at once moved into his place, repaired the broken connexions on the set, and made it work again, while John Laverty and I straightened out his body and laid bare the wound. We could see little of what we were doing, but somehow we managed to pull the torn trousers away from his leg and put his first-aid dressing over the gaping flesh. We laid him out across the floor, where he rested, breathing heavily and saying nothing, while the bombs continued to fall outside.

Meanwhile, John Young was working calmly in the dressing station, tending the wounded by the light of a shaded torch. Now and then an odd bomb, aimed further than the rest, fell among them. The doctor had little doubt that the main bombardment was meant for the dressing station, which the Japs could well recognize from the hills all round, but their aim was short.

At the height of the bombing, two stretcher-bearers staggered in through the curtain of steel with a young man on a stretcher, unconscious, his right leg shattered. They put him on the ground and John knelt over him, shining his torch on the bloody mess of burnt flesh and cloth. He saw at once that the leg must be amputated, and quickly.

He told the stretcher-bearers to take the young man into the theatre, the round pit, ten feet in diameter and five feet deep, where they carried out the most urgent operations. The surgeon was waiting there, a young medical officer, who had not yet completed his training as a surgeon when the war started, but who had seen plenty of experience by the time he reached Kohima.

In the middle of the theatre was the operating table, a stretcher resting on two trestles, with under it, two empty jam tins where the rubbish was thrown. Off to one side were two primus stoves on an old biscuit box with a tray of boiling water

on them; in the water were lying a few instruments. Nearby was an enamel basin, also on a primus, and half full of water. An orderly was squeezed up against the box keeping the primuses burning. The theatre was lit by a hurricane lamp hanging from a pole across the centre of the circle, and over this pole were drawn two canvas covers to shield the light. John Young had not yet had time to build a timber and earth head cover.

The surgeon was squatting on the ground by the box when they brought the wounded man to the entrance and he and the orderly moved out to make room for the stretcher-bearers to carry the man in. One removed the empty stretcher from the two trestles and between them they put the full stretcher in its place. Then they left, taking out the empty stretcher, to walk back through the curtain of steel in search of any other wounded needing urgent attention.

John Young spoke to the surgeon then sent him down to start the job. The young doctor put on an apron which had once been white, and a piece of rag which was all he had for a mask. He then washed his hands in the basin, put on his rubber gloves and examined the wound. First, with the help of the orderly, he gave the anaesthetic, then started pulling away the mess of cloth and flesh from the soldier's foot and from the lower part of his leg. As he pulled the pieces away he dropped them into one of the tins at his feet. He noticed that there was a small muscle just below the man's right eye which quivered each time a large chunk of flesh came away.

When he had revealed and washed the wound, he had to make the agonizing decision which constantly faces the front-line surgeon in war—whether to carry out the complete operation there and then, or whether to patch up the wound so that the patient could stand the journey back to a base hospital and there be operated on again. Upon this decision, in every case, depended the man's life. The surgeon not only had to estimate the effect of the wound on the man's resistance to death, but he had also to estimate how long the tactical situation would allow the man to rest where he was after the operation. For most operations a minimum of ten days' rest was needed before the patient could be moved at all. Here at Kohima there was no knowing how long the siege was to last. Nobody with whom the surgeon came in contact could tell him

that, not even John Lavery. On the other hand, there was little chance of a patient, lying in that dressing station under constant shelling, recovering from a major operation, so the surgeon decided to patch this man up, that is, to amputate at the lowest possible level.

He cut through the lower 'site of election', below the knee, using the instruments as the orderly handed them to him from the water boiling on the primuses. He divided the skin at the lowest level and turned it back all round like a cuff. He felt for, rather than saw, the muscle below the cut, and divided it up, seizing and ligaturing the arteries as he reached them. The whole of his skill, in this part of the operation, came through his fingers alone, because the hurricane lamp gave him light enough to see only the outline of the wound, not all the detail.

Then he sawed through the bone and bevelled the sharp ends to prevent their piercing the skin from within. He let the cuff of skin fall back over the end of the stump, covering it, but allowing free drainage from the wound. While he was feeling with his sensitive fingers, and cutting and binding, the bombs were falling not far away outside, with an odd one falling nearer, shaking the operating theatre and making the instruments and the tin tray rattle on the primuses. Sweat poured from his face so that the orderly had to keep wiping his forehead with a rag to prevent the sweat running into his eyes.

He spent a long time on the operation, about an hour and a half, working very carefully. Every moment was a strain, from the first vital moment of decision, throughout every action in the long struggle to save the man's life, to the final binding of the wound. At the same time he was fighting back the fear of the bombs outside, the fear of making a mistake because his brain and his hands were desperately tired.

But he finished at last and took from the orderly a plaster-of-Paris cap to place over the end of the wound. At that moment two bombs crashed into the theatre, and the three men were blown to pieces.

Bobby, lying not far away, heard the crash and wondered who had bought it this time. He was glad it was not him. He found out who it was in the morning, because the surgeon's hand, with the plaster-of-Paris cap still gripped tight, was lying six inches away from his face.

While Tommy's 'A' Company, down by the D.C.'s bunga-

low, were waiting in peril for the attack that never came, and while the doctors were attending the frightened men lying in pain in the dressing station with no hope of evacuation, Tom Coath was also waiting for an attack with his 'C' Company down on F.S.D. Ridge. He was under fire from guns and mortars, though not so heavily as those on the other fronts, but he knew, like the others, that as soon as the firing stopped an attack must come. He had orders to withdraw that evening through the two Rajput platoons further back along the ridge. Withdrawing in the face of determined attack, even in the dark, is an extremely difficult operation and Tom had two hours to wait and think about it. He must wait until some time after the bombardment was over in order to see what form the attack took; only then could he give orders to Seven Platoon, the first to withdraw.

Seven Platoon, in charge of Sergeant Miles, were out on the very forward slopes of the ridge, nearest the enemy. The sergeant had Private Tanner beside him, as he waited for orders. The private was grouching as usual, though in a whisper: "What is all this withdrawing about? These yeller monkeys haven't got on top of us yet, and I don't see why we need pull back."

The sergeant said, "I agree with you, chum, but we've been told to pull back, and that's what we got to do."

The sergeant had had the same difficulty with all his men; none of them wanted to go back. They felt that once they started withdrawing there would be no end to it; but they had not reckoned with Texan Dan, who was not going back an inch further than he had to, and was not going to allow anyone else to either.

As the shelling ended there was a short space of silence in which the sergeant heard the Japs forming for attack in the hollow below. A runner appeared at his elbow saying, "You got to get out now, Sarge, quick as possible."

Sergeant Miles answered, "Tell the company commander the enemy attack is coming in soon. Ask him. . . ." As he spoke the enemy charged up the hill towards them and rifles and Brens and the enemy's grenades shattered once again the dark fabric of the night. The sergeant seized his Sten gun, shouting, "We'll fight this lot off. Runner, get back to the old man and tell him we're staying on for a bit."

The runner eased out of the trench and crawled back through the bushes to tell the company commander what was happening. Tom immediately called for artillery support on to Jail Hill, and no sooner was the message through than the shells came down among the waves of Japanese who were following up their first attack.

It soon petered out, and the men leant forward on the parapets of their trenches to ease their limbs. The runner rejoined the sergeant, saying, "The old man said pull back as soon as you can."

The sergeant at once said, "O.K., I'll pull out now; off you go, Tanner."

Tanner crawled over to the forward section and found Corporal Charwood, its leader. He said, "Right'o Charlie, get back now."

The corporal answered, "Can't leave yet, got a couple of blokes wounded."

Tanner stumbled back through the darkness and told Sergeant Miles. He said, "F—— 'em," and went forward himself to see what had happened. Both the wounded men were in the same slit trench, and in the light of the pale moon, and of the flashes from shells bursting further up the hill, he saw that one of them would never fight again, though he was not yet dead. The whole of his stomach was hanging out, and both his legs were shattered. The other was crying quietly and feeling his hip, though the sergeant could not see the wound. He yelled, "Two blokes come over 'ere quick," and a couple of men joined them from the next trench. They pulled the wounded man out and the sergeant said, "Take him back. 'Op it." They dragged him away, leaving only the sergeant and the man without legs with his guts trailing out. The sergeant heard him say quietly, "Don't leave me. Don't let them get me." He held the dying man's head in the crook of his arm until he spoke again, "I guess I've 'ad it," and gave a deep sigh. The sergeant felt his heart still beating weakly. He could spend no more time with him now; he had to withdraw the rest of the men, for the platoon behind him was due to go, and if he lagged he would jeopardize the whole plan.

He said to the man, "O.K. chum, they won't get you; you've paid your score," then the sergeant put his Sten to the soldier's head and pressed the trigger. He jumped to his feet,

shouting at the top of his voice, hysterically almost, "Get out of it, you blokes. Get back quick," while he himself staggered out of the trench and followed them back. As soon as he had checked his new positions he stumbled down to the company command post. He reported, "Withdrawal complete now, sir. I'm firm in my new place. Had to shoot one poor sod, though. Christ, I 'ad to shoot him—couldn't get 'im back—'e'd 'ad it, anyway—'ad to shoot 'im. . . ."

His outflow of words was interrupted by Tom saying, "Well done, Sergeant, you've given us all a good start. Take it easy now, and go back to your men."

Sergeant Miles huddled down in his new trench behind the Rajput platoons, listening apathetically to the others coming back. Every now and then he heard whispering between the English soldiers and the Indians:

"Hell, Johnny, everything all right?"

"*Thīk hai, Johnny, sab thīk hai.*"

"It's all yours, Johnny, keep the bastards out:"

"*Achchhā bat—kuchh parwā nai.*"

The comments meant nothing to Sergeant Miles, though they came to his ears through the background of noise. He was thinking of the man he had shot.

Tom Coath was the last in his company to pull back. As he passed by he stopped to explain to the British officer commanding the Rajputs the layout of the ground in front, and the ways by which he thought the Japs might attack. The officer thanked him, and Tom heaved himself out of his trench to walk on back to where his own company was waiting. He had gone only a few yards when a bomb burst close behind him, the explosion hurling his great heavy body to the ground, blasting his face down into the earth, bruising his forehead and nose and chin, knocking him out cold. He came round after a few seconds, ran his hands over his body and was surprised to find he had not been hit. He crawled back to the spot where the bomb had exploded to find the slit trench in which he had been speaking to the Rajput company commander no longer there; instead was a large crater.

He groped his way round the Indians' positions, racking his aching mind for the few words of Urdu he knew, saying to each Indian he met, "*Subahdar sahib kahan hai?*" until at last he found him. He had met this man once before, a man of some

fifty-three years, the very best type of Rajput soldier, with thirty-five years' service in the Indian Army. He said to the old man, "Your *sardar margayā*—dead—finish. *Ap sardar abhi*—quickly—*jaldi*."

The subahdar gripped his arm and whispered urgently, almost desperately, "*Margayā? Na! Na!*"

Tom said, "Yes, he's dead." He heard the subahdar swallow a couple of times and then rattle off a string of oaths in Urdu. Tom gave him a little time to settle down and accept the news that the man whom he loved and respected above all others, and to whom he had looked blindly for orders for the last two years, was now taken away. When he was quiet, Tom gripped him by the shoulder and said, "*Thīk hai, subahdar sahib?*"

The subahdar sobbed, "*Thīk hai, sahib*," and Tom moved away, leaving the man to take over command.

No sooner had he left than he heard the Japs coming in for yet another attack. Amid the din and the turmoil he heard the subahdar urging the men to stand firm. They stood firm.

He himself went round his new company posts, checking that his own men were there, and tying the positions in with those of Donald's men, who were also manning parts of the ridge round about. When he had made a final count he found that ten of the fifty with whom he had started the action had not come back.

He went over to his wireless and reported, "Able Tare Charlie three—withdrawal complete. Ten casualties. Our friends in front now holding off fierce attacks. Their commander killed—subahdar now in charge. Able Tare Charlie three—off."

As John Laverty received the report, I heard him muttering to himself, still wondering whether the withdrawal should have been made. We held so little ground in which to house the wounded, too many already and still increasing in number, and the mass of frightened men without leaders who were the non-combatants. It was dangerous to give ground to the enemy, and yet, when faced with the small number of fighting men, decreasing as it was each day, he had to shorten the perimeter. Yet it was a delicate problem, one that could not be solved by pure arithmetic, and whether his answer was right or wrong would be proved only by the result of the next enemy attack.

As Tom Coath signed off, Tommy Kenyon's voice came on

the air, reporting the effects of the terrible bombardment his men had taken that evening. He pointed out that, already thin on the ground, they had been thinned out still further by casualties from the shelling. Tommy doubted if he could hold on for more than two more nights.

Two nights were not enough; though none of us knew how many nights there would be; we were certain only that it would be more than two. The C.O. considered how he could strengthen Tommy's arm. He already knew that he had no one to draw on for reinforcements, so he arranged, and at once issued orders, for John Winstanley, with his 'B' Company, to relieve Tommy's men by the following evening. John's company were at least that little bit fresher than the others, for they had not yet been out on the perimeter. They had been on Kuki Picquet, a 'safe area', and the C.O. had been holding them there for just such an emergency. As he made the decision to commit them, his last reserve, he looked at Douglas and said, "How much longer, I wonder?"

Six Hundred against Thirteen Thousand

THE 11th of April, the seventh day of the siege, was quiet, except for the usual shelling and mortaring. We tried our best to reduce it by counter-fire from our own guns, but they seemed to have little effect. Yeo paid particular attention to this problem, and he spent the morning, as he had spent many others, sitting on his platform over the heads of the non-combatants and state troops cowering below, spotting and re-spotting the flashes from the enemy weapons. By now he could mark their positions to within a few yards, and when he had marked one or two he would go down to his wireless and call on the 3.7 inch screw guns in the box at Jotsoma to take them on. But in spite of his care and the accuracy of the little guns, there seemed to be no relief from the weight of fire we received each day.

On his way down from one of these spotting trips he called in to talk matters over with Bobby. He said, "I don't know what the answer is. Our guns seem to be firing right bang on the spot where their guns and mortars are sited, yet we don't seem to be knocking them out."

Bobby said, "As for the mortars, I can see as much from here as you can from your platform, at any rate in the one direction I am facing. What they're doing is moving the blasted mortars after every half-dozen rounds, so by the time your fire comes back, there's nothing to hit. While you're busy shooting at nothing, they open up from another place further down the ridge. Where the hell they move them to, I don't know—they just disappear from sight—but I imagine they bob down behind the ridge and move along behind it to some other site."

As he spoke he kept shifting his body and easing his shattered leg, wincing with pain at each movement.

Yeo said, "Well, what's the bloody answer?"

Bobby replied, "Our own mortars. We can shoot them off quickly enough to hit the little sods before they move."

Yeo said, "But John won't do that; quite rightly, he wants to hold them back to ward off the night attacks. That sergeant of yours, King, says that he has only to fire once in daylight to bring a whole lot of muck down on himself. Of course he is dead right; he hasn't any mortars to spare, nor can he get any more."

So Yeo continued to worry, but he never did find the answer; there wasn't one, at least not until later, when the 2nd Division brought their twenty-five pounders into play from down the road, but we were not to have their support for a long time yet.

At ten o'clock that morning, we in the command post heard welcome sounds of fighting over to the west. The C.O. went out to see what was going on, and shouted down, "By God! they're on Punjab Ridge."

I went out, and through our glasses we could see them fighting for possession of the ridge. This meant that the rest of Brigade had broken out of the Jotsoma box and were fighting up the road towards us. For the first time since the siege started I saw John Laverty smile. He said, "Get around and tell the men." As I went round I could feel, even before I spoke, a ripple of excitement passing from man to man. They too had heard firing, and though few of them could see the action they knew what it meant.

John Laverty continued watching. There was a tree stump five yards outside the command post, on which he used to sit when he wanted to escape from the stale air of the dug-out. He normally sat there only at night, but today, excited as he was by developments to the west, he sat on the stump to watch. He had been there only two minutes when a sniper's bullet struck the stump between his legs. Heffernan, who as usual was close at hand, stood up and looked round to find the sniper. He saw him in the top of a small tree, one hundred yards away, just inside the perimeter. He did not stop to think how the Jap had got there, but raised his rifle at once and fired three rounds. The body did not fall out of the tree, but it slumped a little and the

head fell back at right angles to the man's trunk, as though the neck was broken. Heffernan shouted, "Bejasus, I got him, sir!" but his C.O. was not there to hear him.

Once in the dug-out, John Lavery put on the earphones and called Brigade:

"Nan Tare Oboe One. Request latest report. Over."

The reply came back:

"Nan Tare Oboe One. Wait. Off."

Then a little later, half in code and half in clear:

"Nan Tare Oboe One. One one Punjab attacking Punjab Ridge. Doubtful exploit further due danger to flank. Five Brigade overcome enemy at milestone three two, now halted at milestone three eight and can see your place. Do not expect quick follow-up as am at present repelling further attacks on Jotsoma. Not able yet assess their strength. Of interest to you that patrol from two Division made contact with us today. Expect strong enemy reaction today's activities. Hope may relieve pressure on you. Over."

John replied, "Nan Tare Oboe One. Thanks. Off."

The news was depressing. It was quite obvious that hopes of a quick relief, raised by the fighting on Punjab Ridge, were now dead. In fact, the fighting there came to a standstill at three o'clock in the afternoon.

Soon after this wireless talk Victor King came in. He was a breezy young man commanding a platoon in John Winstanley's company—"B". He was blond, good looking, debonair; he was rather enjoying the war. He said, "I've been sent up as you asked to explain the position on F.S.D. Ridge, where there's a bit of a mess. Donald Easten is trying to sort it out now with the others, but there's a mix-up of 'C' and 'D' companies, some of our own blokes, with the Rajputs and Japs all muddled up among them.

"On the way down to have a look round I caught a Jap properly with his trousers down. There was a latrine screen in the bushes; it didn't look like one of ours. I went to have a dekkko and found a Jap on the job; it didn't take me long to send him off to crap with his ancestors. Personally, I like a bit of privacy for that sort of thing, and certainly wouldn't choose a place in the middle of the enemy postions; the man must have been a fool.

"Well, that's the sort of thing that's going on. Donald told

me that some of his chaps are waking up to find the enemy on the other side of the next-door bush; it seems that the bloke that wakes up first is the one that lives. We're better off than they are in that respect, as we're not getting any sleep anyway. The situation is made worse by these damned bashas all over the place, all hugger mugger, with our chaps in some and the Japs in others. How the devil Donald knows where his men are I can't conceive, but he seems to have a fairly good idea, and he reckons he'll have it sorted out by this evening.

"By the way, I found some documents on the crapping Jap. You might be able to make something of them."

"I took them off him, dragged out my little dictionary and started to work. I was soon astonished to find an identification of 124th Regiment, the third regiment in the Japanese 31st Division. This was too much. I grabbed the mike and asked Brigade to check. They told me that it was undoubtedly correct, that 124th Regiment had also turned back on Kohima. They said they thought that only a third of the regiment was in action against us, and the rest against them; they had themselves captured a similar identification only an hour before.

Even so, this was staggering news. We now had the best part of the complete division against us, say some thirteen thousand men. I passed on the information to John Laverty and he simply wouldn't believe me, but took the microphone and asked for the Brigadier. He said, no codes, no nothing, all in clear, "For Heaven's sake, what is this? The whole bloody lot's against us now. I reckon we can take it for a bit, but there's a limit to everything."

The Brigadier said, "Hold on a little longer and you will make history."

The C.O. replied, "Thanks! We'll enjoy that," and left the set. He said, "I suppose I'd better tell the men about this, though what the hell history means to them, God knows."

He went out, escorted by Heffernan, down to 'B' Company. He caught John Winstanley as he was leaving to reconnoitre the relief of Tommy Kenyon's company down at the D.C.'s bungalow. He told John about his talk with the Brigadier and said, "Tell your chaps that there's history in the making."

John's sergeant-major, who was standing by, commented: "History be damned. We'll keep these bastards out, come what may."

When he had gone, John Winstanley dodged over Summer House Hill and down the spur to meet Tommy Kenyon in one of his two slit trenches. Tommy explained the situation:

"I'll show you the layout of the platoons in a moment, but be quite clear on one point, there's no retreat from these positions; there's nowhere to retreat to. If you pull back a few yards you're on top of the Garrison Headquarters; if you pull back behind them you're on top of the C.O.'s command post; so here you have to stay.

"The real danger is on the left flank, though the Japs don't seem to have cottoned on to this yet. What they are doing is forming up at night in the dead ground beyond the tennis-court—you can hear them doing it, they're a noisy lot of sods—then coming straight at us across the court. While they continue to do this you've not much to worry about, as we have weapons galore on fixed lines over the court, but there's a bit of cover round the far end with a hut behind the platoon positions there. If they fight their way into that hut you've had it; as they can overlook you. There is not much you can do about it, except warn the platoon at that end. We could well destroy it as it's just a damned nuisance; you can't store anything in it, but on no account must the Japs be allowed in. That's about all there is to it.

"By the way, Yeo's guns are quite incredibly good. You can have them shooting just on the other side of the court, and they never make a mistake. It's just about the most accurate thing in shooting I've ever seen."

The two officers then crawled round the positions, while John showed his platoon commanders where they were to go. Sergeant Glyn Williams was one of these, detailed to take over from Sergeant Brooks. He was young to be a sergeant, being only twenty-two years old, but he was intelligent, with a definite personality, and was, moreover, a fine athlete. He had come to John two days before the siege started with a draft of Welshmen destined for the South Wales Borderers. These Welshmen had settled in to their English unit quickly, and John found them, as he expected, wonderful soldiers. He now took special pride in commanding the 'Company from the Valley', as they had come to be known. Sergeant Williams, who came from Pontypridd, was no exception to the high calibre of these men.

When John came to go he found Williams and Brooks squatting by a bush and looking at the water-point forty yards away. The non-combatant Indians were using this point quite freely, and against orders, throughout the day. They came down individually with their water-bottles because they were parched with thirst, and must have relief. Brooks and Williams were taking bets as each Indian came into sight on whether he would reach the water-point or not. Few of them did because it was in full view of the Japanese posts on the other side of the road. On his way back, John reported this situation to Peter Franklin who had to place a guard near the point to keep marauders away.

The relief started soon after the evening hate was finished. There was still a glimmer of daylight filtering through the trees when Victor King led his platoon down the spur to take over the dangerous position on the left flank. As he came near he signalled his men, who had been edging forward from cover to cover to avoid the snipers, to lie down, and from here they bellied forward in groups of two or three, up to the trenches and dug-outs they were to occupy. As they came to their own trench they slipped quietly in while Tommy's men, who had been waiting for them, scrambled out and moved back to a rendezvous a little way up the spur. There was no noise, no talking, no muddle. It was all very carefully planned and neatly executed, every man knowing before he went down exactly where he had to go and what he had to do. There was no single indication to the Japanese listening only forty yards away that a relief was taking place. One hour and a half after dark the relief was completed and John Winstanley saw Tommy disappear into the darkness to take his own men over to Kuki Picquet. Then the attack came in.

Victor King and his platoon were better prepared than the rest of the 'Company from the Valley' because they had been in position longest. First they heard the clicking of bolts, the cocking of weapons, the rattle of equipment and constant chatter as the Japanese formed up beyond the court. At once Victor called on Yeo to bring down the guns and in a few moments they were firing among the enemy. But even as the shells crashed down the first rush of the attack came towards him across the court and the rifles and Brens opened up and men threw grenades as fast as they could pull out the firing

pins. The attackers came onward relentlessly, heard rather than seen, until they reached the very edge of his platoon position, and here they wavered. As they hesitated more bullets were fired into them from the Welshmen's weapons, more grenades were hurled in among them, until they broke and ran back across the court. As they reached their starting point they found the shells still falling, so they went back further, to the cover of their own trenches, scattered about in the bungalow gardens.

It was not long before the second attack was launched, with fresh troops this time, hundreds of them it seemed, yelling as usual to boost their morale. This second attack, too, was beaten off, but this time Victor realized that the shells were not falling among the enemy as they retreated. At once he contacted his company commander. "Look here, John, for God's sake keep the guns going. What the hell have they stopped for? We're missing a golden chance."

John replied, "Keep your hair on, Victor. I've sent a message through already. I'll have an answer in a minute."

The answer came, "Victor, the bloody guns are engaged at Jotsoma; the mortars are shooting in front of the Rajputs. We've had both for a bit."

As Victor received this message he heard the Japs gathering for yet another attack. He knew that the best time to break it up was before it was under way, while the enemy were still sorting themselves out into attack formations in the dead ground. Previously the guns and the mortars had in part done this, but now they were wanted elsewhere. Victor decided to break it up himself.

He had to wait until the enemy came closer, edging their way up towards him in the dead ground, trying to cut down to a minimum the distance over which they must make their final assault across the open and up the spur. He waited until he heard them forming up only thirty yards away in ground he had chosen for a grenade S O S task, then took a primed grenade from one of two boxes placed in the trench beside him. He started lobbing the grenades in among the Japs. An intense feeling of strength and triumph surged through him as their screaming and confused shouting told him that he was finding his mark. He knelt over the boxes, taking out one grenade after another, hurling faster and still faster into the hordes below.

His left forefinger was torn and bleeding from tugging at the ring on the firing pins, but he took no notice of this. He had to keep throwing, and throwing fast, so that the Japs had no breathing space.

He took no account of numbers until he groped among the boxes to find them empty. He yelled at the soldier who shared his trench, "Fetch down some more grenades, they're our only chance." The soldier disappeared while Victor crouched low, listening to the sounds of pain and confusion coming up through the darkness. After a while he heard heavy breathing behind him, and a bag was pushed into his hand. He whispered urgently, "For Christ's sake get some more up. I need hundreds," and the soldier scrabbled off while Victor started throwing again.

For an hour and a half he remained kneeling and throwing, waiting, then throwing again, more slowly as the grenades came to him less frequently; but while he was there no attack came. The soldier passed back a report of the action and John Winstanley himself took a hand. When his own stocks began to run out, John crawled down to speak to Victor so that he too realized the urgent need for grenades as the only way of holding off the attacks. He went back to his wireless and called the command post where Douglas was manning the set. He did not waste time on wireless procedure; "John here. Get some grenades down to us, and get them down quick; we're in big trouble."

Douglas answered, "Where the hell am I going to get them from? Battalion reserve is practically used up, and the Rajputs are getting stick."

John said, "I don't care where the hell they come from. Victor's out there fighting a battalion single-handed, and he must have what he wants."

Douglas started, "Christ almighty . . ." but John was no longer on the set. Douglas handed over the earphones and went out, collecting Heffernan and Boorman, his own batman, on the way. He went round the companies, collecting what grenades there were, but stocks were low. What he found he delivered to John.

The fighting round the tennis-court continued throughout the night. John Winstanley ordered Victor to rejoin his platoon when the grenades ran out, and the Japanese at once followed

up with yet another assault. At last they made progress, and a threat began to develop on the dangerous left flank.

Corporal Veale, Queen's Gamekeeper from Sandringham, destined later to become a Royal Servant, one of the few Englishmen left in the company, was out on the extreme left with his Bren gun; his number two on the gun and his friend, although he had known him for only five days, was Private Williams.

Veale was solid and slow, both mentally and physically, though his eyes and ears were sharp as needles. He had extraordinary charm and had never been heard to say evil of anyone nor known to lose his temper.

In contrast his friend was moody and quick to anger. His skin was pale and his body short; immense shoulders tapered to a thin waist and narrow hips while his forearms bulged with muscle. They made a good pair for battle.

Throughout the night they heard the Japs drawing slowly nearer, until a little before dawn the enemy were wriggling through the bushes all round them. Veale engaged them when he could, but once they were in the bushes he had only sounds to shoot at. Every now and then he fired a short burst as a bush rustled or a twig cracked, but he knew that they were bypassing him and that he was not going to stop them. He could only stay where he was and fire at anything he heard or saw.

Then he and Williams heard them moving in the two huts behind, those same huts that he had been ordered to keep secure at all costs.

He was about to move when the Japs rushed his post. They came quickly out of the darkness, but he heard them coming and fired his Bren until it jammed in mid-burst. They they were on to him, grunting, sweating little men, jabbing out with their bayonets, while Veale and Williams fended them off. Williams lost his rifle, torn from his hands and flung away into the darkness, but he fought on with his bare hands until the Japs passed over them and he heard a small voice saying, "They got me Taffy—can't move me legs."

He said, "O.K. Corp. I'll fix it," and at once felt round for his rifle until his hand came in contact with the shovel they always kept to hand. Private Williams knew all about shovels, he had been handling one for several years deep down in the vast black coal seams hundreds of feet below the Rhondda

Valley. He dragged it out and made for the huts, his Welsh blood running hot. The yellow bastards had done in his corporal and taken his rifle. He'd show them. He burst into the nearest hut, kicking open the door, guided in his blind fury by the careless talk of the Japs inside; as he entered, he started flailing out with the shovel. He connected at once with flesh and bone, heard the man groan as he went down and kicked the body out of his way. He smashed about in all directions. He hit another body, then another, and then crashed into a wooden table, sending it flying, himself falling on to the damp earth. He was on his feet in a moment, whirling the shovel round his head, hitting out at anything or nothing. The shovel broke through the flimsy wall with a splintering crash, bringing him, for a moment, to his senses. He listened, heard a moan at his feet, and crashed the shovel down on to the body there. Then he started flailing out again—but the Japs had gone.

He found himself outside the door, bumping into a body in the dark and taking another wild swing until somebody grabbed him by the arm:

"Take it easy you wild sod—it's King."

"The bastards have left that one, but there are more in the other. I'll show 'em."

King said, "No you won't, I have a section and a couple of grenades will do the job."

Japs were milling about all round them, crashing in the bushes, cursing in high treble voices, barging up against the wooden building, shouting sharp orders, but King walked calmly through them towards the second hut, guided again by the careless chatter. He felt his way round the walls until he found a window just near the door. He pulled the firing pins from the two grenades then, first waiting for two seconds, dropped them inside, hurling himself at the same time to the ground.

The grenades exploded, one after the other, while the men inside screamed. One dashed from the hut, treading on King's head as he went by, tripping over. His hurtling body cannoned into Williams, waiting three yards away, who took one more wild swing and, by chance, the blade of the shovel buried itself in the man's head. He tried to pull it out, wrenching violently at the handle until it came away. He threw it from him and

seizing the shaft, put his foot on the man's head and tugged again, but the shovel was wedged firmly in the skull.

King joined him. He said, "Did you get him?"

"Yes, sir. Bashed 'is 'ead in."

"Well done, man. Get back to your post."

Williams crawled over to where Corporal Veale was waiting; he was still alive, but his chest and legs needed attention. The rest of the Japs had flown.

The sound of fighting round the D.C.'s bungalow was a close background for Peter Franklin's activities that night, for it was his turn to take the water party down to the water point. He collected the men after dusk near the command post, five from each company. Every man carried two chagals, shaped canvas bags with narrow necks and each with a capacity of one gallon. After leading them down in single file to within thirty yards of the water point he placed them under cover. He himself inched forward on his stomach until he heard the thin whisper of the spring bubbling out from the ground; a mere trickle, but just enough slowly to fill the chagals. He held the first of his own two canvas bags to the mouth of the spring, and after eight minutes, he felt by its weight that it was full. He handed it back to the man who had crawled up behind him; then the second one when that was full. The man took them away, handing him two empty chagals in their place. He started filling these.

After two hours he had filled half the chagals. He was handing one back when the man behind him slipped off the steep slope, down into the road below, his rifle clattering on to the tarmac and the man himself cursing. At once Peter drew back a yard or two from the water point, and no sooner had he drawn back than he heard the 'phut' of the bullets as they hit the bank where his head had been. He drew back still further and lay waiting for thirty minutes, until the shooting stopped. Then he edged forward again, and started filling the remaining chagals. It was 2 a.m. when he filled the last container and carried it back himself to the dressing station.

At dawn reports on the night's operations started coming in to the command post. First Peter reported that the expedition to collect water had been successfully carried out. Eleven gallons had been delivered to the dressing station and fifteen distributed between the companies.

Half an hour later John Winstanley came in to give an account of the fighting on his own front. He finished by saying, "The only thing we can do down there is stay put. There's not an inch of room for manoeuvre and, anyway, the ground's too hard to start digging new trenches. By the way, you should know that Victor put up a pretty good show during the night and a bloke called Williams did some smart execution with a shovel."

Soon after he had gone Yeo came to report on the Rajputs. The C.O. had sent him down when they were most heavily pressed to interpret orders. Yeo was full of enthusiasm:

"They put up a bloody fine show. There's no doubt their morale was shattered by the loss of their officer, but the old subahdar pulled them together splendidly. He's a fine fellow. Even so, I think they ought to have a British officer in charge who can speak their language. I can spare my subaltern, if you agree."

John Laverty told him to go ahead and arrange it. Yeo said, "As soon as it was light enough, the Rajputs started counting Jap dead in front of their positions. By the time I left they had counted twenty-eight."

Black Thirteen

AT first light on the 12th April, the eighth day of the siege, the C.O. held a review of our situation, after calling John Young and Peter Franklin into the command post.

He said, "I am not at all happy about the supply situation, particularly regarding water and ammunition. We've been all right up to date on what we found in the place, but I don't believe we can carry on without replenishment. What's the form, Peter?"

Peter said, "I for one have water on the brain; I've thought about practically nothing else since we've been here. I don't see a hope of putting up the men's ration. The only way we can get anything in is by air, and aeroplanes can't deliver the water we want. I expect John has some views on what is needed for the dressing station."

John said, in a fatigued but calm voice, "We need plenty for the wounded; I would say the situation there is critical, and the shelling we're going to suffer from now on is not going to ease it.

"There aren't enough stretchers to go round, and I literally haven't space on the ground for further lying cases. I don't think space is going to be too great a problem—though God knows we are crowded enough—because as casualties come in room is made for them by wounded chaps being killed or dying. But we must have stretchers if we're going to make the badly wounded even half comfortable.

"My staff is running out, both doctors and orderlies. Another serious incident like the one we had the night before last will just about see us through.

"But worse than anything is this water business. I don't suppose you realize what hell it is for doctors moving about in

that dressing station and watching men die whom they might save if only they had a few pints more of water. We must have my requirements dropped from the air."

The C.O. said, "All right, John, we'll put it in the demand—water and stretchers. Give the details to Douglas, and also those for your medical stores."

John Young had rather glossed over the problem of space. Taken in all the battalion's perimeter was now reduced by withdrawals from the D.C.'s bungalow and on F.S.D. Ridge to an area of only five hundred yards by five hundred by four hundred. In this area were at least two thousand five hundred men, most of them unable to fight; the wounded because they could not through injury, and others because they would not through fear. Nearly every shell caused a casualty and it was this that in time was going to bring the question of space to the forefront of the doctor's mind.

That these appalling facts had not undermined the morale of our soldiers was quite astonishing. They all knew that if they were hurt or diseased there was no hope of proper treatment or of evacuation to a comfortable hospital. They all knew that if they were badly wounded the chances were that they would die in acute discomfort and intense pain, because the equipment necessary to mend them again was not available to the overworked doctors. Yet in spite of this, and despite depressing news of the slow progress of the troops coming to our relief, their morale remained high.

The C.O. continued, "What about ammunition, Peter?"

"Well, Douglas can tell you that the stocks of grenades are practically negligible. I believe he had a bit of trouble sorting some out last night."

Douglas chipped in, "Yes, there are no more than forty left between the lot of us."

Peter continued, "Mortar ammunition is running out, too. Sergeant King has been doing a wonderful job and, needless to say, has not been sparing in his use of it."

The C.O. murmured, "How could he be? How much has he left?"

Peter answered, "About a hundred rounds or so, stored with his mortars, with nothing behind them."

The C.O. said, "All right, give the details to Douglas. Is there anything else?"

"There's plenty, but I suggest we don't ask for more than that for a start; water, medical stores, grenades and mortar ammunition. All the three divisions at Imphal will be on air supply, and we'll be damned lucky to get an allocation of aircraft, even a small one, so let's keep the bids down to what is vital."

The C.O. said, "I agree."

Douglas then raised a point. "What are we going to do about these constant demands from companies to send out fighting patrols? It's a good sign of the state of mind the troops are in, and demands are coming in daily. I feel we should meet them."

The C.O. said, "It's no good, Douglas, we can't afford to lose men in offensive actions. You know damn well that while we keep to our positions we can inflict ten times the number of casualties we suffer, but as soon as we start throwing our weight about we'll lose men in numbers we can't afford. You've only to do one of your simple sums to see how it works out. Whatever the effect on morale, we must refuse them. Now Peter, you and Willie go off and find the dropping zone, and Douglas send the demand to Brigade."

I went out with Peter, and as we moved round the area we found that sniping was on the increase. Every tree round the perimeter, and every hill, seemed to be full of Japs ready to pick anyone off. The cover at first afforded by trees and undergrowth was now of little value, thinned out, as it was, by shell fire and trampling feet. We tried to keep down the sniping by counter-sniping, and had some success, but we never put an end to the menace. Peter and I discussed a safe route to take, but nowhere was it safe to move as the whole area was overlooked. We could only run from cover to cover as quickly as possible and look around from the shelter the cover gave us. I felt sorry for the stretcher-bearers, the ammunition parties and the cooks taking out meals, whose loads prevented them from moving quickly. They could only walk stolidly on and pray that they would not be hit. Many of them were.

It was difficult to find a suitable dropping zone. I thought back to our training days in Chas, and the lessons on air supply. We were told that a D.Z. should be four hundred yards long and at least fifty yards wide, with no hills rising for two miles around. It was quite impossible to find a place of this size in

our little area. In addition a D.Z. has to be clear of men while dropping takes place, so that no one is hit when parachutes fail to open or when bundles break on leaving the aircraft. After a while, I suggested to Peter that the only possible place was in the shallow dip between Summer House Hill and Kuki Picquet. We told the non-combatants who were resting there that they would have to clear out. They shambled off sadly to find somewhere else to go, somewhere sheltered from flying metal and pelting debris, somewhere safe; a place to sleep until it was all over.

We had to mark the D.Z. so that the aircraft could recognize it. For this purpose we had yellow strips of cloth to put out in the shape of a letter previously agreed with those sending the aircraft. We knew that as soon as these appeared on the ground the Japs would make them a target. I guessed that Peter and I would have to lay them down and we agreed to put them out at the last minute, and to waste no time in doing so. Other signals we had to use were red and green lights to show the pilot whether or not it was safe to drop; these, again, would draw the attention of enemy snipers and gunners. The place we chose was seventy-five yards long and half as much across. Anything falling outside it, provided it was inside our perimeter, we could recover, but only at great risk and effort, so we hoped the pilot, when he came, would have his eye in.

As we left the D.Z., two snipers' bullets pinged over my right shoulder as close as I cared to have them. Peter and I hit the ground at the same moment and rolled a little way down the hill until a bush gave us cover. We crept round and took a different way back, leading through the dressing station. The sights and sounds of this concentration of patient suffering were almost unbearable. The doctor had been wrong—there was not enough space—but even as I looked, stretcher-bearers were carrying away to a small burial ground on I.G.H. Spur three soldiers who had given up the struggle to live; perhaps they found death a happy release. The Indian non-combatants we had cleared off the D.Z. were mingling with the wounded and the doctors and stretcher-bearers were finding it difficult to move them on. It was a heart-rending job but the wretched mob of dejected beings had to be shepherded away somewhere; wherever they went, they were going to be frightened and

leaderless. No one of their own was willing to take charge, while we found our hands full leading our own men.

When I returned to the command post, Douglas was already reading our demand for air supply over the wireless set. Apparently the whole demand was accepted, and the drop was promised for the following afternoon. We could have done with it before then, but this was out of the question because the aircraft were wanted elsewhere. Yeo called across that the mountain guns at Jotsoma were also short of ammunition. Since the Jotsoma box was itself surrounded, they, too, had asked for an air drop of 3.7 inch ammunition for the following day. Yeo remarked, "I am afraid we'll get very little support, except on S O S tasks, until they've had their drop."

The C.O. remarked, "I hope they get it quickly."

Yeo was leaning over towards us while speaking. As he turned back to his wireless set a bullet whanged through his observation slit and hit the dug-out wall two inches from his head; if he had still been talking, it would have passed through him. It hit the dug-out with a loud 'phut', showering stones and earth all over him. There was no reaction whatever; he did not even hesitate in the movement he was making to put the headphones on his ears. In a normal tone he sent his message to the guns, accepting the restriction on supporting fire. Only when he had finished did he look round and say, "I suppose I'd better block that hole." Helped by his orderly he filled in the look-out slit and made another one adjacent to it.

The usual sporadic shelling and sniping disturbed the day, but in the evening came real trouble, this time for Fred Collett and Donald Easten on F.S.D. Ridge. Fred, the champion road walker from Manchester, had squeezed his thin little body into Donald's dug-out. His cadaverous face was covered with stubble and filth for he had been on the perimeter since the first day of the siege.

Donald, his company commander, was in little better shape. Normally well built and upstanding, his shoulders hung forward from constantly crouching in trenches and holes in the damp ground; his eyes were red rimmed, half closed with fatigue; his moustache, normally well clipped, straggled down over the corners of his mouth to join his wispy, mouse-coloured beard. Both men stank, but smell was part of their life now, the

smell of their own foul bodies, the putrescence of decomposing Japs or the sharp stench of cordite.

Scratching his crutch, where dhobi's itch set up a maddening irritation, Fred was saying, "I wonder how much longer we'll be able to hold out. It'll be a damn shame to have to pack up after all this."

"The men are O.K.," answered Donald, "they won't crack; it's just a matter of water and ammo. The platoon commanders are in and out of here all day, begging to take patrols out, and I guess they are voicing the thoughts of at least ninety per cent of the men."

"What about the Rajputs? They must've taken a bit of a blow, losing their only British officer."

"Don't know them at all, but they look pretty good to me. That old subahdar chap is a fine bloke and I don't think he'll let them go. Of course it must be hell for them, fighting among strangers who can't speak their language."

"I don't reckon we're strangers; the men aren't, anyway, they talk to them like long-lost brothers, language or no."

Donald said nothing, but listened to the night falling. Both men stayed quiet, while day left the sky with tropical swiftness and the night noises took over from the hurly-burly of day. The insects, recovering from their awe of the deafening din of the evening hate, set up their discordant chorus. An occasional bullet whined as the snipers took advantage of the last moments of daylight. A man coughed, another moaned, while the Rajputs out in front hawked and spat as is their custom. Behind these sounds the evening was deathly still, as only an evening can be after the noisy turmoil of a day's fighting in the intense heat. The dank cold began to eat into their flesh. Fred and Donald tried to relax, turning in on their own thoughts.

Fred's mind went back to a mad caper in Baghdad on the way out to India when, for a wager, he walked twenty miles into the town in the full heat of the day. Walking was his hobby, the wager was a certainty, but it was a mad thing to do with the temperature at one hundred and fifteen degrees in the shade. He wondered what his mother would have thought of him then. She had always supported his ventures, foolish or wise; his starting of a dance band in Manchester, his walking feats, his attempts to run youth clubs at Harpurhey, where they lived

in a small house in Hatfield Street. He felt sure that she would approve his actions now, and somehow the thought lent him strength.

Donald's mind, as usual, was on horses and hounds and hunting country in Kent. Apart from his wife, Billy, who was also under fire eight thousand miles away, he thought of little else between fighting. Sometimes he thought of his irresponsible young brother, his closest friend, killed at Harfleur in 1942; but longing for him was too painful. He was running now with the West Kent streaming away before him from Coldblow, fast in the wake of a fox who had set his mask for the Boot. He wondered, as he had wondered many times before, how long it would be before he was there again in the flesh.

The two men's thoughts were interrupted by the night battle starting on I.G.H. Spur. It seemed so remote, though only a few hundred yards away; the dull thumps of exploding shells and the brittle chatter of the automatics came to them as if from another planet. They thanked God that it was not they who were being attacked. They heard the next day that the Japs, though supporting the attack with fighting patrols and jitter-parties, had again been repulsed.

Soon they were aware of other sounds, much closer, more sinister, a little way over to their left. An occasional shot or burst of machine-gun fire rang out, fired hastily and without aim. It was easy for the two battle-worn men to tell whether a rifle or machine-gun was being fired by competent hands or whether the man behind it was a little afraid. Donald, who knew the ground as well as his own front garden at home, assessed the situation at once. He said, "They're infiltrating between Tommy and the Rajputs. You'd better go off."

He had worked out before with Tommy how to deal with this threat should it arise, and he held a section of ten men in reserve for the job.

Fred went off to collect them, creeping quietly through the dark. The men fell in silently behind him and went slowly forward in the direction from which the sounds were coming. Soon Fred picked up another sound, bodies wriggling and rustling among the bushes in front. He stopped, touching the man behind, who passed the signal back. Then suddenly they were in among the enemy, enemy who had come through the forward barrier of Rajput soldiers.

All at once they were engaged in the fury of hand-to-hand fighting in the dark. Each man had a short bayonet fixed to the end of his rifle for just such emergency. They were at very close quarters almost as soon as they became aware that the enemy was there; there was no room for manoeuvre, no time to give orders. The fight developed into a *mêlée* of striving, cursing men. A corporal was the first to bump an enemy. It was impossible to see in that pitch darkness who was friend and who was foe so the corporal used his nose, sniffing for the acrid, sweaty smell given off by the Japs. He crouched until his nose told him that there was someone near who was no Englishman or Rajput; then he leaped, thrusting his bayonet forward with all his strength. He felt it go into the man's body, cutting through flesh, grating against bone, but he pushed harder yet, until the bayonet was buried to the hilt. He was taking no chances; the Japs were quick to react, an officer with a flailing sword, a soldier with bayonet or bullet.

The weight of the body falling tore the rifle from his hands. He groped round until he found it, pulled it up, and standing on the man's body, heaved and tugged until it came out. He was not yet sure that the man was dead; he put the point of the bayonet against the body, pushed forward his safety catch and pressed the trigger. He dodged swiftly to one side and stooped low in the bushes while his breath came back and his nerve steadied. He moved forward again, looking for someone else to kill.

He heard the swearing and grunting of the men fighting round him, the moaning and crying of the wounded. Then the acrid smell was in front of him again, and he stabbed forward, striking hard into another body. He slashed this man through the throat, so he did not need to use a bullet afterwards. He crouched down again to rest.

He became aware that the fight was moving away from him. He heard a shout, high-pitched, in Japanese. He heard the padding of feet and the crashing of bushes as they broke into a run, away from the deadly bayonets of his own men. He heard Fred Collett shout, rallying the men round him, to lead them forward at a walk after the retreating enemy. They had not gone far before they heard the sounds of firing fifty yards in front, and guessed that the Rajputs were shooting the Japs as they passed through. Fred decided he had done his job, so he

stopped the men and made a quick count. Two of the ten who had left with him were no longer there; he made a mental note to look for them in the morning. He sent the remainder back to their posts, himself reporting to Donald. Donald picked up the microphone and told Tommy, and the subaltern in charge of the Rajputs, and John Lavery, what had happened.

Hours later, while it was still dark, there was a great burst of firing from the left rear of Fred's position. It was quite near and over the firing he could hear the screams of attacking Japs. He guessed at once that they had tried the manoeuvre again, wriggling through between Tommy's men and the Rajputs, heading for a basha from which they could shoot into the back of all the positions on the ridge.

Fred again collected his men and took them off towards the basha to drive the Japs out. When he was only twenty yards away a parachute flare shot into the sky, lighting them up as though in a stage spotlight. The men froze, as they had been taught, and stood quite still while the light was shining and while a hail of fire poured into them from the basha. Two fell. When the flare was gone, Fred withdrew them quickly before another went up; they had only just gone down under cover when its light burst into the sky. Three more times he tried to creep up to the basha, each time from a different direction, each manoeuvre requiring half an hour of stomach-crawling over the rocky ground, but always, before he was within assaulting distance of his objective, the flare was fired and the wall of fire came down. He decided at last that without covering fire, without a proper plan, he could not drive the Japs from their stronghold. Someone else would have to do that, someone less tired than he was, with troops less exhausted than his. He dragged his scraggy body back to the dug-out to tell Donald what had happened.

The thirteenth of April, the ninth day of the siege, dawned bright and clear. A grey light showed first over the mountains to the east, and quickly moved up the valleys to where tired men lay waiting for it, longing to be rid of the darkness which gave cover to the enemy, longing to be rid of the cold and misery, though they knew that the sun, when it came, would bring them fresh discomfort, burning lips, parched throats, sweating bodies. But better the warmth and the sunlight, through which the Japs would not attack but only hurl their

bombs and shells, than the cold dark of night in which every bush moved and every sound was an enemy poised to strike.

The sun followed close on the heels of dawn, thrusting up over the mountain, flooding the white cotton-wool clouds of mist still rolling up from the deep valleys with colours of pink and gold. The soldiers cared not for the intense beauty of the scene; they cared only for the warmth in the long golden shafts piercing down through the trees.

With the dawn a few reinforcements came dribbling down to Donald's command post. He had no idea where they came from; he only knew that he was glad to see them. He guessed that John and Douglas were doing a good job back there, using as economically as possible the few men at their disposal. This did not stop him constantly demanding more, but he was well aware that Tommy and John Winstanley and Tom Coath were making similar demands, for all of them were too thin on the ground.

He welcomed the men, and sent them off with Fred to their various platoons. There was no time to fit them into the organization, to give them training; nor was there time for these men to learn to know the commander and the others with whom they were to fight. Fred merely handed them over to the young officer or old sergeant commanding the platoon, and he in turn showed them the trench they were to occupy. Whoever they found in the trench was their friend, whether they liked him or not.

While Fred was away Donald dodged up to headquarters to talk over the situation created by the Japs' occupation of the dangerous basha. Tommy was already there and was saying, "We must have a counter-attack to clear them out. They're looking right into the back of my position and not a man can move without drawing fire. You'll have to do something about it."

The C.O. said, "O.K. Tommy, we'll see what we can do. Can you help, Donald?"

"No," said Donald, "the position is the same with us."

They talked for a while longer about shortage of men, of water, of ammunition, and about the lack of sleep, then they left to take the dangerous journey back to their own company positions.

An hour later the counter-attack was made. John Laverty

scraped up a platoon of the Assam Rifles which still had not been involved in the worst of the fighting. These men, small brown men with Mongol faces, looked very much like Gurkhas to us; they were as brave as Gurkhas and were led by their own commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel 'Topper' Brown, who had brought them through the exhausting retreat from the Chindwin. A tea planter by trade, he was both fearless and cheerful, despite the fact that he had lost, in the previous six weeks, all but fifty of his command of seven hundred men. Throughout the siege he went hatless while wearing a roll-neck pullover and issue slacks. He was a great asset to the tired and dejected garrison, an inspiration to us all.

Donald and Tommy, from their different posts, watched them forming up for the attack, while their own men brought fire to bear on the basha and the positions held by the Japs around it. The little men from Assam charged in and with bullet and bayonet cleared the Japs from their stronghold. The enemy, as usual, did not give ground; every one had to be killed.

When the fighting was at its height, two machine guns opened up from G.P.T. Ridge, overlooking the tiny battleground. Tommy and Donald saw the men from Assam fall over, one after the other, as the concentration of fire tore into their ranks. Undaunted, they carried on the fight, trying time and again to cross the bullet-swept ground until their commander decided that no value could be gained by continuing the advance. He ordered them to withdraw.

When the fighting was over a sergeant brought down a fatigue party of non-combatant Indians to clear away the wounded and dead. They carried off first the wounded of both sides; then came back for the dead. They took our own dead to a place nearby where they were buried. Then they came back again for the Japs, took them to the edge of the cliff by Kuki Picquet and dropped them over to remove from sight their bloody bodies and gaping wounds; but the stench, as the bodies decomposed, came up from the road and spread over the whole area; the smell of death was with us all the time. The sergeant, as he came to each dead Jap, kicked in his teeth with the heel of his boot, extracting all those made of gold. The Japs are fond of gold teeth, and the sergeant had grasped their value. As he took the teeth from their mouths he dropped them into his pocket. The men all round watched him,

undismayed. The horror of war was seared deep in their souls, erasing human values.

Before the machine guns hit them, the men of Assam had driven through as far as the perimeter, but they were unable to clear the rest of the area. The enemy were left on F.S.D. Ridge, within thirty-five yards of the top, too close to our own front-line positions which were also on the forward slopes. Enemy guns on Jail Hill could fire direct into our trenches, so that it now became obvious that our positions on F.S.D. Ridge would have to be abandoned; we must take another step backwards.

As soon as the action was finished Tommy and Donald were on their wireless sets calling battalion headquarters. Tommy said, "Able Fox Baker One. Counter-attack partially successful, but position here untenable. Another counter-attack essential, or must withdraw. Over."

John's voice replied, "Able Fox Baker One. No troops available to repeat counter-attack. Cannot allow withdrawal yet. Stay where you are. Off to you. Able Fox Baker Four. How are you? Over."

Donald answered, "Able Fox Baker Four. Agree with Fox Baker One. Position untenable unless enemy cleared from feature today. Same applies our friends further forward. Over."

The C.O. said, "Stay where you are until further orders. We'll call later. Off."

John Laverty then started thinking. He knew that Tommy and Donald would never give an inch of ground unless it were essential. What made it essential was that staying where they were would involve a waste of life while they achieved little or nothing. He thought it might be just possible to withdraw to Kuki Picquet and still leave room for the wounded and other non-combatants within the perimeter, but he did not want to withdraw yet. Eventually he would have to shorten the perimeter and remove Tommy's men and Donald's and the Rajputs from their positions, exposed as they were to attack from close quarters and to enemy guns on Jail Hill and G.P.T. Ridge. He had not yet found a way of silencing these guns. Even so, he would make the Japs fight for every inch of ground; he would not withdraw until driven back.

The day dragged out for Tommy's men and for Donald's while the shells poured into them. For some the day ended

early in the roar of an exploding shell and the agony of white-hot metal tearing into their bodies. Those that were left longed now for the cold misery of the night to shield them from the unremitting fear of accurate gunfire.

They were not the only ones shelled that day, for the dressing station was once again a target. We were first aware of the result when John Young, early in the afternoon, tottered into the command post. The man was completely exhausted; it was a wonder to me what kept him going. We had all been short of sleep since the siege started, but I guessed that John Young had had no more than two hours in the last seven days; most of us were better off than that.

He spoke in a tired monotone, his voice neither rising nor falling, completely expressionless:

"I've just had two more direct hits on my dressing pit and the effect on my staff is disastrous. I now have only one assistant doctor and ten stretcher-bearers to look after well over two hundred casualties. I'm sorry, John, to sound so hopeless, but we're in a mess. The best way you can help is to give me a few sensible chaps to help move the wounded about and keep these non-combatants on to digging. They need constant supervision or at the first sound of a shell approaching they push off. I've been giving it attention myself, but I can't do that any more. As you know, we're only digging at night, so your chaps can return to their positions if you want them by day."

The C.O. said, "I'll see what I can do, and let you know within half an hour."

John Young continued, "I must mention one or two bright spots. That fellow Shaw of yours is an inspiration. I know he suffers intense pain all the time, and yet he lies grinning at everyone who looks into his hole. He chats constantly with the men nearby, though he can't see them, and what he says they pass on to the others. Though I know I shouldn't, I can't help be glad that he bought it.

"The padre is a tower of strength. He is working like a Trojan now, clearing away the mess in the dressing pit. He has words of comfort for everyone, though I believe he's scared as hell, and the fact that he knows all about the battle, because he has seen it from the most dangerous places on the perimeter, lends weight to what he says. We owe him a lot.

"The dark spot is water. I hope to God it comes down all right."

John Laverty said, "So do I. The aircraft are due in a few moments. Peter and Willie, you'd better go off and take the drop."

Peter and I made our way down to the area we had selected for the dropping zone. The Indian non-combatants were back and we had to shout at them to clear it again. The aircraft were due at 14.30 hours and at 14.20 we heard the sound of their engines as they searched for our signals. We took a wireless with us and we knew the frequency on which the aircraft were operating, but try as we would, we could not pick them up. The signaller kept calling in the monotonous voice that signallers keep for tuning and netting calls. Time after time, as he passed speech over to the pilot, there was no answer.

AT 14.25 we dashed out into the small clearing and laid down the yellow strips in the shape of a 'T', our code letter. As we expected, no sooner were the strips laid than the snipers started searching for us. Peter and I each armed ourselves with a Veray pistol, he with red cartridges, me with green. The red lights would tell the pilot not to drop, the green ones to go ahead.

Exactly at 14.30, the first batch of planes, three Dakotas, came into view. They circled round for a while and I fired one green light to tell them to start dropping. Apparently the pilots did not see it, because the three planes continued circling. After a while I saw them coming in for the first run, and they passed clean over us without dropping their loads.

I shouted, "By God, Peter, they're dropping in the wrong place!" As they passed over the Fort the bundles came out from the tails of the planes, the parachutes opened and the loads descended slowly into the Japanese lines. Frantically the signaller repeated his tuning and netting calls while Peter blazed off his red signal lights one after the other, but the planes continued on the same circuit. In the space of twenty minutes they dropped all their loads on the Fort, while we were powerless to stop them.

Many of the hungry men on the perimeter, men dried up with thirst, men without grenades, without mortar bombs for support, men who had seen no mail for ten days, were watching. Many men in the dressing station who knew that only water

and drugs and medical equipment, provided they came today, would save their lives, were watching. They knew what it meant for the Japs to receive our stores; it meant that the mortar ammunition and grenades would be fired against them; it meant that there would be no drugs to take away pain or save wounds from rotting. But they watched the whole heart-breaking performance while the planes moved not a yard this way or that from their chosen course. They went on dropping until they were empty, then flew away.

Peter and I waited for the next batch, not long in coming, and this time they picked us up and the drop was accurate. The pilots had a difficult run in because of the ridges and the hills surrounding the D.Z., but they took every conceivable risk to skim over the tree tops and so put the stuff down into our tiny clearing. These three planes circled only twice, then came straight in on their run after I had given them the green light. The first plane belched out the four panniers; the parachutes opened and down they came, swinging gently, right on to the D.Z. Other loads followed from the two planes behind.

On the second run, as the drop was due to start, I saw a Sikh walk into the middle of the dropping zone, carrying a shovel. I shouted at him to come back, but the sound of my voice was drowned by the engines. The Sikh heard nothing, but walked on into the middle of the clearing as the first load of panniers were ejected. The first three parachutes opened, but the fourth failed; and the great bundle fell down, unchecked, striking the Sikh between the shoulders. He was crushed into the ground and the bundle passed on, spilling its load in all directions. When it had gone there was nothing to see of the Sikh except his bearded face, staring stupid and unscathed from a pool of blood, and one leg jutting up at an angle from the ground. I quickly looked round to see what had burst from the panniers. One of the boxes had rolled quite close, and I noticed Peter was already looking at it with strange expression. The markings on the box were quite clear: 'AMN HOW 3.7 INCH'. We had only two 3.7 inch guns in the place, and we were unable to use them.

I said, "I guess we've got the drop meant for the guns at Jotsoma." The full implication did not strike me at the time, but it meant that we would not get the mortar ammunition we had asked for, that the guns at Jotsoma would not get theirs,

so we would have no support either from our own mortars or from the guns outside until another air drop was arranged. We did not know what had been dropped on to the Fort by the first batch of planes, but we were to find out when the Japs opened their bombardment that night.

Meanwhile, the planes droned on overhead, dropping the rest of their loads with perfect accuracy, all packed with useless stuff. Soon they went away and a third batch of only two planes approached. These found us at once, and started dropping as soon as I gave them the signal. On the second time round, after dropping only four of his panniers, a pilot took one risk too many. As he came in on his run, he skimmed too low over Jail Hill, his wing tip catching an upstanding tree and slewing round the machine. At once it went out of control, tearing a great path through the forest, burning and withering the foliage, leaving a brown track of tangled tree trunks and shrivelled brushwood, a scar on the hillside that was to mock us in days to come. We could hear the sounds of tearing metal and smashing wood as it ripped through the jungle; then we heard the explosion and saw the flames and smoke shoot skyward. The one plane remaining finished its drop and went away.

Peter and I gathered the men waiting to clear the D.Z. and set them to work. Two or three bundles were caught in the trees and the men climbed up and cut them down, leaving the parachutes festooned. Others were lying out in the clearing, exposed to the snipers, so that six men had to dash out, grab the bundle and drag it under cover before removing the parachute harness and straps. After an hour and a half we had twenty panniers collected. We did not bother to bring in those holding the gun ammunition.

We found that we had received in all three-quarters of the medical stores we had asked for, but no water, no mortar ammunition, no grenades. Peter and I reported the result to John Laverty. He reached for the microphone and called Brigade. He was furious. When he had finished he passed his hand over his face, saying, "The thirteenth of April—Black Thirteen. I hope to God the fourteenth will be brighter." His voice was infinitely tired.

Assault by Shadows

THERE followed a night of bitter fighting on all fronts. Peter Doresa was in charge of one of Donald's platoons on F.S.D. Ridge. Peter, tall, dark, handsome, always clean and immaculate, was most at home in the ballroom, in the drawing-room, in society. But now he was hunched down, bedraggled and dirty, in a trench well forward, for his platoon was holding a part of the perimeter, though set back a little way from the Rajputs' positions. There was no question of platoon commanders having tidy little command posts with their sections spread round them in proper order. The platoons were so small that the commander himself had to block a hole by manning a forward trench, and at the same time lead his platoon.

He shared the trench with a Bren gunner, Private Peacock. Peacock had a brother in the regiment somewhere, a brother well loved from whom he had never before been separated for more than a few hours. They had not seen each other now for three days, but Private Peacock knew that his brother was still alive because the colour-bloke told him so when he brought the meal round in the evening. He missed his brother; he liked to have him near, but it was too dangerous to try to bridge the gap between them, so he shared his trench with Peter instead.

As darkness fell vague shapes started moving all round them. Some came to within a few yards and then stopped, apparently listening before moving off again into the night. Others they heard sneaking through the bushes to their right and left, and some they heard even behind them. This was a typical Jap technique, the silent approach, the quiet searching for positions firmly held and then the infiltration round them. When they employed this technique, instead of noisy mass attack, they came in gym-shoes, with their rifles and equipment bound with

cloth so that there would be no single sound. The soldiers found it hard to bear this silent filtering of the enemy round their positions; the soundless, shapeless shadows played on their nerves, already frayed; their fingers were tensed against triggers.

Private Peacock found it no easier to bear than the others. Time and again he whispered, "Shall I shoot?" while Peter answered, "No," and gripped his arm. After a while the shadows drifted away.

Peter said, "We're going to cop it again tonight."

Peacock answered, "We keep copping it all the time. How much longer is it going on for?"

Peter said, "For as long as Texan Dan tells us."

Peacock whispered quietly to himself, "Texan Dan—yeah—he's the bloke. Sodding fine bastard!"

The shapes came back again, flitting between the trees, but still there was no shooting. Peter had given orders that no one was to fire until the enemy were within fifteen yards, and then only if they could see well enough to be sure of hitting. He hoped the men would hold firm for there was no way left open to strengthen their resolution. It was dark, so they could not see him; he had to stay quiet because the shapes were in among them.

Gradually the number of moving shadows increased, until it became clear that the enemy were trying to come through his platoon position. When three of them came within two yards of the trench Peter nudged the private and ordered, "Fire!" and a long burst clattered out from the Bren. One of the shadows fell into the trench, knocking the two men off balance, but Peter, quickly recovering, hurled out the moaning body, while Peacock put the Bren to his shoulder to wait for more.

Meanwhile other Brens, other rifles, were blazing off while the soldiers released their pent-up feelings in a riot of rackety noise. Red and green tracer bullets criss-crossed through the dark trees, parachute flares cast great pools of shadowed light on the rock-strewn ground, flames flared and died then flared again as bushes and bashas burned. Men shouted and screamed, men moaned, men died, but the shapes remained so that Peacock continued firing, then waiting, then firing again until at last, after two full hours, the shapes went away.

His brother, meanwhile, was only twenty yards away, alone. Yesterday he was sharing the trench with somebody else, but as the evening meal was being delivered a mortar bomb fell nearby blowing his friend's head off and shattering the cook's body against a tree. He did not like being alone; he was cold and miserable and shapes were moving all round him at which he was not allowed to fire until they came closer than he thought safe. He needed courage to restrain himself from firing, and there was no one better to give it him than his own brother. Together they could have held off a battalion, but, alone, his strength quickly ebbed away. He longed for his brother's presence, but anyone would have done, any other chap like himself whom he could hear, and to whom he could whisper now and then about his fear; but there was no one, and the loneliness was hell.

When the first battle was over, and the shapes had gone away, he found it difficult to stay awake. He knew well that to fall asleep was courting certain death, but exhaustion crept over him, paralysing his body, weighing heavily on his eyelids. If only there was someone else there to give him a jolt, or with whom he could take it in turns to snatch a few moments' sleep; but there was no one. After a while he gave way to the intense longing and slumped back into the trench, his rifle falling forward and outward over the parapet.

Quite suddenly he was awake, at first aware of firing and shouting to his right and left, then realizing that there was a body in the trench with him, and an acrid stench of Japanese sweat. He felt round for his rifle, but could not find it; then the Jap turned towards him. He needed no further awakening. There were two weapons left to him, his hands, and he went for the Jap with these, lashing out wildly at the stinking body, though space was too restricted for a knock-out blow. He felt for the man's throat, groping at his cheap ragged uniform, while the Jap tried to scramble out of the trap. Peacock's right hand, in its frantic search, grabbed a sheet of metal; he tugged at it, hard, until a searing pain shot up his arm as a sword cut into his fingers. He thought, 'This bastard's an officer,' and somehow the thought, and the pain, roused him to fury, shaking off the last vestiges of sleep. He pummelled the Jap wildly with his fists and knees, kicking out with his feet, clambering on the man's body, hammering away with fists and elbows, while his

enemy tried to hold him off in the tiny space of the slit trench. The Jap butted out with his head and twice caught Peacock in the solar plexus; he brought his knee up sharply into the private's crutch, but anger had driven all sense of feeling from the soldier's body. He was determined now to kill the sod, and throw him out. Soon the Jap began to give way before the sheer weight of his fury; then Peacock took his chance.

He hooked an armlock on to the Jap's neck and started pressing downwards, forcing the man's chin over his forearm, forcing the forearm against his Adam's apple. The Jap's back was held straight against the side of the trench; there was no room to wriggle free. Sweat dripped from Peacock's face as he exerted still more pressure; blood poured from his cut fingers while his wound throbbed ever more violently. As the pressure increased the Jap screamed, once, twice, until the screaming died away as he fought for breath. His body convulsed, his breath coming now in great sobs; his hands groped blindly at Peacock's face and body, but the pressure increased, forcing his head down further and further until, at last, the body went limp and a rattling sounded deep down in his throat.

Peacock seized the sword and ran the body through, then stuck it in the ground beside him. He threw the officer's corpse out of the trench, then bound a length of four-by-two round his cut fingers, felt round until he found his rifle, and settled down to wait. He decided not to sleep again.

By two o'clock in the morning the attacks on Peter's platoon were fading away; he sensed that the Japs had given up the attempt to infiltrate through. He said to Peacock, "I'll go round and stand the men down." When the men were 'stood down' it meant that those who shared a trench could take turns in sleeping; those who did not had to stay on watch.

As Peter was moving off shells started bursting on the Rajputs' platoons further forward. They sounded to Peter like 75 millimetre and the dreaded quick-firing anti-tank guns, fired from Jail Hill and G.P.T. Ridge. From the Rajput positions came a chorus of cries and Peter realized that the guns were making themselves felt. They were firing on fixed lines straight into the Rajputs' trenches, lines which had been fixed during daylight when these trenches were under direct observation from the hills above.

Soon there was confused shouting in Hindustani; the noises

came back towards Peter and then veered round to his left so that he knew the Rajputs were pulling out. They did not pass quietly, and what they were yelling at each other were words of defeat, words of panic, jumbled, senseless words; he knew by the tone. He felt the mood enter into his own mind so that, for a moment, he wanted to run back too; with an effort he shook off the mood, but realized that all the men in his company would also hear them retreating and would be affected as he had been. Perhaps some of them would be unable to put away the feeling as quickly as he had done. Panic takes firm hold, and spreads quickly.

First he lugged Peacock out and dashed round to his men, telling them to stand firm, then, collecting two others, he went down to the Rajput positions, not more than fifty yards away, to satisfy himself that they were empty. Shells were falling all round him, but it did not take him long to find out that very few trenches were occupied and these by mangled, bloody bodies of Indian soldiers. Peter returned and reported to Donald.

Donald was on the set at once. "Hullo Able Baker Dog Four. Message for you. Over."

John Laverty's voice came back. "Able Baker Dog Four. Send your message. Over."

"Able Baker Dog Four. Troops in front abandoned positions. Enemy now on top F.S.D. Ridge, making our position critical. By daylight it will be untenable. Can you mount counter-attack to drive them off. Over."

"Able Baker Dog Four. Appreciate position extremely dangerous. Will do something. Wait. Off to you. . . . Able Baker Dog One. Counter-attack top F.S.D. soonest. What troops have you? Over."

Tommy's voice answered, "Able Baker Dog One. Only one weak platoon available. To use this must have platoon relieved in present position. Over."

"Able Baker Dog One. O.K. Counter-attack soonest. Will relieve with Assam by dawn. Is this understood? Over."

"Able Baker Dog One. Wilco. Off."

"Able Baker Dog Four. Did you get that? Over."

Donald answered, "Able Baker Dog Four. Roger. Off."

The platoon concerned belonged to Jack Faulkner, an impetuous young overgrown schoolboy. His military training

had been short and sketchy; he had not taken it very seriously.

Only five minutes after the end of the wireless conversation, Tommy had given Jack his orders, and at once he was out of his trench calling the men round him in a loud voice. They all knew the ground intimately, and he himself gave the briefest possible orders to section commanders. He finished, "Get cracking," and led them forward at top speed while they followed, with difficulty. Soon they branched off into different section groups and as the attack went in Jack realized he was on his own, though he sensed where the men would be; he knew the ground so very well. There was no cunning in his plan, nor any in his method of leadership. The platoon went headlong for the Jap lines with Jack leading at the top of his voice. They cleared the Japs off the hill top with bullet and bayonet, and forced their way into the positions the Rajputs had occupied. Here they waited for the rest of the night, crouched low under the force of the shelling which continued until first light.

Some time before dawn Jack heard the enemy in a hut over to his left, moving about and talking aloud in the careless way they had; some of them were even walking around outside the hut. Jack decided that these men would have to go; left where they were they constituted a dangerous threat.

There were two Molotov cocktails, bottles full of petrol with an inch of igniter fuse held on by tape, in the trench he had taken over that night. Without pausing to think he picked up the bottles and darted forward to within throwing range of the hut. He took out a match, ignited the fuses and hurled the bottles one after the other at the target. He heard them land on the atap roof and then fall to the ground without lighting. Immediately he ran forward, placed the bottles against the wooden wall, took out his matches and set light to the now shortened fuses. The bombs caught fire at once, the intense heat shooting skyward in violent flame, searing his face, burning his eyelids and the tight-drawn skin on his forehead. He staggered backward and stumbled off, half blinded, towards his trench.

The ruse was a complete success, and the hut was at once enveloped in flames. The Japs stayed, as usual, preferring to die rather than abandon their position, but when the heat inside became too intense even for them to bear they ran out,

squealing like pigs and stark naked, carrying their clothes in one hand and weapons in the other. Jack's Bren gunner picked them off in the firelight as they went, firing long bursts until the gun jammed.

When his sight came back, Jack watched the slaughter. He was pleased that the Japs had gone, but he wished he had learnt more about weapons of war, for it had been a close thing. He remembered how even in Kohima, just before the battle started in earnest, Tommy had had to teach him how to arm a grenade.

Meanwhile, quite early on that same night, Sergeant Glyn Williams was waiting his turn. While waiting he hummed quietly to himself many of the beautiful Welsh songs he knew so well, for he had a fine tenor voice and loved to sing. Just as he had made up his mind that nothing was going to happen that night, the screaming horde was suddenly on top of him. They came without warning, but even so, as soon as they appeared, Brens and rifles and machine guns blazed, while the call went out to Sergeant King for support from his mortars, and to Yeo for fire from his guns. But more than these the sergeant wanted grenades because he and his men could throw them into the enemy without giving away positions, and they were wonderfully effective against the mass attacks. But there were no grenades. The sergeant and his men had all seen the aircraft that day, putting down the vital supplies on the enemy in the Fort, while dropping only useless 3.7 inch ammunition on our own D.Z. Texan Dan sent a message to all the men explaining how the mistake had come about, but explanations were of no use to men who had to hold off hundreds of Japs attacking in waves, or else die and let vital ground fall.

The shells from the Jotsoma guns were landing on the other side of the court, deadly accurate, but the guns were firing at slow rate, not at the usual rapid. Sergeant Williams knew that they, too, were short of ammunition, because their airdrop had gone astray. There was no support from the mortars because they were engaged elsewhere, so it was up to the sergeant and his men to fend off the enemy. They did so, time and time again, sometimes stopping them short of the trenches with small arms fire, at other times using their bayonets to hurl them back.

When the fighting reached its peak Sergeant Williams felt

a burning hot pain in his neck. He tried to clasp the wound with his right hand, but found that he could not move the arm. The bullet had severed some vital nerve or muscle, paralysing the right side of his body down to the hip. He put his left hand to the wound and felt the blood flowing out. Through a daze of fatigue and half-consciousness he was somehow aware of the need to stem the flow and with great difficulty took the first-aid dressing from his hip pocket. Tearing off the cover he held it with his left hand against the wound. He could do little to help his men with his neck punctured, his right side paralysed and his brain half numbed. Holding the dressing to his neck, with his Sten gun slung over his left shoulder, he floundered back to the company command post to report to John Winstanley that he would have to go back to the dressing station. His company commander offered him a stretcher but he refused, saying it might be needed for somebody else. He started walking up the hill.

Meanwhile John went forward and dragging Corporal Richards out of a slit trench where he was commanding a section put him in charge of the platoon. He had noticed Corporal Richards before; whatever he did, he did it thoroughly and well, and John felt he could rely on him to fill the gap in command. Corporal Richards did not let him down.

When the sergeant arrived at the dressing station, John Young took him in hand. He examined the wound in the light of a shaded torch, and dressed it in such a way as to stop the flow of blood. He ordered the sergeant to take his place in one of the pits in the dressing station, but the sergeant said, "I'm not staying here, man, I'm no good to anyone cluttering up this place."

"You'll do what you're told. Your right side is paralysed, and if you go back to the battle it'll be paralysed for ever. If you stay here you have just a chance. You aren't much use back there, anyway."

"Good God, man, can't you see I got men to lead? My brain's clear now, and I can do that. I must get back."

The doctor said, "You'll do what you're told," and turned round to deal with the next patient.

Sergeant Williams clambered to his feet and walked over in the direction the doctor had shown him. Then he branched off and shuffled down the spur to the tennis-court, to take his place

again at the head of his platoon. He wondered whether he would ever sing again.

He found the battle dying out on his own front, but to his left the Japs were still fighting hard. As he listened, he was surprised to hear the Bren fire slackening off; the Brens stopping in the middle of long bursts, then failing to fire again for some time. He knew the cause for this, the guns were jamming, and he made a mental note to check his own weapons as soon as it was light enough.

The Brens were jamming not only in Sergeant Williams's company, but in all companies, for reasons not hard to find. The guns were carefully cleaned because the gunners were well aware of their importance, but so tired were they that faulty handling and loading while the guns were firing was causing misfires and stoppages. In addition, it was almost impossible to keep the weapons dry because they had to be trained in the open towards the enemy; they could not be kept under cover.

As the threat to the left flank developed, a Bren gun jammed at a vital moment, when the enemy were making a rush attack on a section post. They over-ran the section and made for a shed some fifty yards behind. They were quickly inside, turning it into a strongpoint from which they could threaten the whole position, but Victor King had the answer to this. He still had a few grenades, and, as he had done the night before, he sneaked up to the building and lobbed them in, killing many and driving out the others.

This was not the last attack on 'B' Company that night. It seemed that the Japs had been ordered to break through at all costs, so Victor King and his men, Sergeant Glyn Williams, John Winstanley, and all of them were engaged all night in fending off, without grenades or proper support from guns and mortars, masses of fanatically determined enemy. By dawn they had succeeded, but many were killed and all were exhausted. The tennis-court, and the dead ground beyond, were covered thick with corpses.

An hour after dawn, the Japs put in yet another attack, preceded by showers of grenades; they followed it with yet another, but such was the slaughter inflicted by John Winstanley's men during these daylight attacks across the open court, that the Japs, after the second time, gave them up. 'B' Company were able to relax a little and lick their wounds

while their commander reported to the C.O. that for the time being he had shot his bolt; his men could do no more.

John Lavery started working out the reliefs—a daily problem now—where to put this platoon, where to place that, how best to employ men who were near the limit of physical exhaustion and nervous strain. He said to Douglas, “We’ll bring John back to Summer House Hill until his men have had some rest. We have Tommy and Donald on F.S.D. and they will have to see it through for at least another night, but get on to Tom Coath and tell him to contact Donald and tie in his position with the other two companies. I’m pretty certain there’s a muddle down there which could well be tidied up. Tell him I’ll come down myself later and have a look round.”

Douglas answered, “Right, sir, I’ll arrange that,” and crawled across to the wireless. It took him only a few minutes to issue his commander’s orders, but it was some time before they were carried out. So heavy was the sniping that it was well after dark before the men from Assam had finally taken over John’s position.

While Douglas gave short clear orders into the microphone, Peter and I went to check the dropping zone for the daily supply by air which we had now arranged. As we came out from the squalid Jug-out we saw the whole area covered in smoke, a thick white pall which hurt the eyes and filtered down into the lungs. The men were wiping their running eyes on dirty sleeves or bare forearms and stifling hacking coughs with filthy pieces of rag. The Japs were mixing smoke bombs with the H.E. from their mortars. It occurred to me that they must be running short of H.E.; it was not long before I discovered that I was quite wrong. The smoke gave cover from the snipers and of this we were glad. When we had cleared the D.Z. of the mob of Indian non-combatants, I went on down to see Donald at his ‘D’ Company command post. Soon after I arrived, a young lacc-corporal reported in. He said, “I’ve been out with a small patrol, like you said. I found four Japs sitting in a bunker chatting. As we came up one of them called out, ‘Come over ’ere.’ At first I was so darned surprised that I only stared, and as I stared they became even more friendly, signalling us over and holding out a packet of rice. They were in an odd place, just between our lines and ‘A’ Company’s, and it beat me how they could sit there quite calmly talking to us. I thought

this funny, and they seemed to be settled there for the day, so I brought back the patrol without doing anything about it. I thought I'd better check the details."

Donald said, "So far as I know, they've no right to be there. You'd better go and polish them off."

The young man answered, "Thanks very much; that suits me fine." He collected a Bren gun and the rest of his patrol and went back to the bunker, marvelling at the Japs' courage and incredible stupidity. He stopped his patrol a few yards away and went forward himself to confront them with the Bren. A look of stupid surprise spread over their faces, but before they had time to recover, he shot them all. He reported to Donald that the deed was done.

Soon afterwards, at midday, and while I was still with Donald, a thick mist came rolling up the ridge, thickened by smoke from the Japs' mortars. Donald was at once alive to the danger and gave orders for all to stand to, unnecessary orders, as it turned out, because the men saw the danger as soon as Donald. The Japs attacked through the mist and smoke, armed with grenades and with gelignite to blow up the trenches. After one of Donald's sections had been completely smothered with grenades and gelignite, they climbed out of their pits, ran back up the ridge, those of them that could still run, and joined other sections on the flanks of their own captured post. The two flanking sections sprayed the whole area with small arms fire, while the mortars put down a few of their meagre store of remaining bombs. The Japs came no further, and when the section commander collected his men and led them back to their posts he saw why. There were twenty Japanese dead lying there.

This action lasted no more than twenty-five minutes. When it was over I left Donald to return to headquarters. On my way I met his company sergeant-major, a man called Haines, in charge of a fatigue party of four men carrying ammunition, though he himself was being led by a soldier. Although the mist and smoke was still fairly thick, visibility was now clear for at least twenty yards, and I had to look hard at the sergeant-major to discover why he was not making better progress. I saw that he was quite blind.

I asked him, "What the hell are you doing here, Sergeant-Major? You ought to be back in the dressing station."

He said, "So they tell me, but I can't do anything there. As long as Hills can lead me around, I can do my job. No, sir, I'm not going back there. Anyway, this will soon wear off."

I asked, "Where did you get it?"

"I don't know where, sir, but it was a couple of days ago. Feels like somewhere round the back of my head, but it's not too bad and I'll be seeing again in a day or two. Must get on now."

I saw no point in arguing with the man; I imagined that Donald had already tried to persuade him to go for treatment. I watched the party move off, the sergeant-major tapping the ground with a stick, led by the young soldier, while the four carriers followed. It occurred to me that wherever the sergeant-major led, they would follow, not only these four, but any who looked to him for leadership.

On my return I found Douglas taking off the earphones. He turned to John, "Just got a report from Brigade that we'll be relieved by 16.00 hours today. Should I tell the men?"

John said testily, "Don't be so bloody stupid. How can we be relieved in three hours' time when there is no sound or sight of fighting down the road. We've had these reports for the last two days and I made the mistake then of passing them round. Never again. When the relief appears right here we'll tell the men, not before."

The C.O. was right. There was no relief that day, but there was one bright spot; the airdrop was successful.

Kuki Picquet Falls

THE next night was the first without major attack, but there was one important incident for C.S.M. Haines. He was forward with his company; by his side was his self-appointed guide and bodyguard, the young lance-corporal, Hill. The lad had been given a stripe only a week before, and put in charge of a section, but the section was now gone, all of them either suffering pain in the dressing station or buried in shallow graves. He had been with the C.S.M. two days before when the bullet struck and took away his sight and it was then that he took the older man in hand. In the darkness they were discussing the question in everyone's mind: 'How much longer?' when the Japs started moving round them.

The lance-corporal whispered, "They're coming," and the C.S.M. answered, "I hope no one shoots too soon."

For a time there was silence, broken only by the rustlings of the shapes in the bushes, the click of a rifle bolt or the cocking-piece of a Bren. Hills noticed the shapes all moving in the same direction, towards two of the bashas which had been the bane of 'D' Company's existence since they moved into the present area, but which could not be destroyed because they provided cover for vital stores. He whispered to the C.S.M., "They're coming in behind us, in the bashas."

Then suddenly everyone started shooting, Donald's men, Tommy's men, everyone who thought they could contribute something to turning the Japs out of the bashas. The C.S.M., though he could not see, sensed where the trouble lay, and told Hills to lead him across towards the buildings. They were in acute danger of being shot down by their own men, but the C.S.M. urged the lance-corporal on. He knew that the only way

to clear the Japs was with grenades; he had some in his pouches and was intending to use them.

The two men bumped into Jack Faulkner, also moving towards the huts with the same idea in mind. He shouted, "Get down. I'll fix this," and crawled forward a few yards before lobbing a Molotov cocktail, hoping he would have better luck than he had the last time he used one. It failed to ignite and he tried an incendiary bomb, but again without success.

The C.S.M. shouted, "Grenades," and started feeling in his pouches. Jack yelled, "How many have we got?"

"Three."

"Not enough. There are two huts, and a lot of Japs."

"Right. You fix the first one; I'll get some petrol for the second."

While Jack went forward through the hail of fire now being concentrated on the huts from all directions, to drop his grenades inside, Lance-Corporal Hills led the C.S.M. back to the company cookhouse. They each grabbed a tin of petrol and tottered back to where they had left the subaltern. The young man was waiting for them; he had silenced the Japs in the first hut.

The firing had now died down, only an occasional burst of tracer cutting through the dark pall of the night, so that Jack was in less danger as he carried the petrol forward and threw it on the near wall of the second hut. Lighting a match, he held it at the full length of his arm, dropped it into the petrol, then ran. In five seconds the hut was a sheet of flame and one minute later the Japs ran out. They ran straight through Faulkner's own platoon positions, along the line where he knew the Brens were laid, three of them, but each fired only one short burst and then stopped. Jack cursed the gunners for incompetent fools. He bellowed in anger, "Why the hell can't the bloody fools keep their Brens working?"

The C.S.M. said, "They're your men, but they're bloody tired. When you get tired you become careless about the way you load the magazine and work the cocking handle. When this happens things go wrong, and the Brens won't fire. If you make sure your men keep them clean and properly oiled it is as much as you can expect. I suggest. . . ."

The subaltern yelled, "Good God, Haines, I don't need a lecture at this time of night." He thought, 'Christ, the man's

balmy,' but he took the lesson to heart. The three men returned to their own trenches and spent the rest of the night sleepless, but quiet.

In the command post we were thankful for the respite, though it gave us no more sleep than we had had before. John Laverty was awake as usual, planning and plotting, manning the wireless from time to time, waiting for any event that might demand a quick decision. It was not until four in the morning that he lay down for two hours on the hard, cold earth. He slept at once, but moved and muttered in his sleep.

Soon after dawn, Heffernan came, jarring our ragged nerves with his usual cry, and with breakfast in his hand. There was no tea this morning; breakfast was warmed-up bully beef and biscuits. Though the previous day's airdrop was successful, we could not waste aircraft space on food; more than food we needed water, ammunition, medical stores. Aircraft were in short supply and in great demand; besides ourselves they had three divisions to maintain down at Imphal.

This day, the 15th of April, the eleventh day of the siege, passed quietly—rather too quietly. We could not understand why the shelling had stopped. We hoped that it was because the Japs were running short of ammunition, but we suspected that they were saving it only for a heavier bombardment later on. John Laverty went out to look at the country around, hoping to see something of the fighting that might be taking place to the west; perhaps through his binoculars he would see something of the progress the troops were making down there. He made for the same old tree stump, first looking up to see whether his friend the sniper, shot by Heffernan, had been replaced. The dead body was still there, hanging out at a grotesque angle from the tree, the corpse bent double over the retaining rope. Soon, as the flies and ants ate further into the flesh, it would drop. John sat down and raised his binoculars to his eyes. He saw little.

Later, in the afternoon, a young officer stumbled in. We had never seen him before, and I was wondering where he had come from when he said, "My name's Johnson, 4/7 Rajputs."

The C.O. asked him, "Where the hell have you come from?"

He answered, "I've come cross-country from Jotsoma with a small patrol."

This was a wonderful moment, our first contact for eleven days with the world outside. We should have been overjoyed, at once exhilarated by the feeling that all our troubles were over, but we were too tired to rejoice, too tired even to feel a momentary sense of relief, and the officer did not have the reception he deserved.

The C.O. asked, "What's the form out there? I thought we were going to be relieved yesterday."

"I was briefed before I came, sir. The form is that the rest of Brigade are still tied down in the Jotsoma box, though they've made progress as far forward as Punjab Ridge. They can't leave the box until their base is made more secure, and the only way this can be done is by more troops. The Second British Division are on their way, fighting up from Dimapur. They've cleared the road blocks at milestone thirty-eight, but two days ago they still had two miles to go to reach us. Apparently their advance is hindered by frequent blocks along the road. When I left at midday yesterday we were expecting them any minute, and the plan is to burst out of the box the moment they arrive. I'm surprised that the troops detailed to reinforce you, that is the 1/1 Punjabs, aren't here by now. I was wondering whether I'd make it before them. Brigade said I should tell you the reasons why they've not been able to get here earlier. The Brigadier considers it militarily unsound to leave the Jotsoma box, holding the guns, without first securing it. Only the Second Division can provide that security. The Brigadier hopes that the stiff fighting in which two Div. and ourselves are now involved will relieve pressure on you."

John Laverty thought for a while. Like all of us, he had great confidence in the Brigadier, 'Daddy' Warren, who had shown us, during the previous six months, that behind a quiet and benign exterior lay great driving force and sound judgment. But the critical nature of the situation in Kohima, the shortage of all necessities, the fatigue of the men and the state of the wounded called for plain language.

The C.O. said, "Thanks. You can go back and tell Brigade that unless help arrives here within forty-eight hours, Kohima will fall. I don't need to tell you why: you can look round and see for yourself. The men's spirits are all right, but there aren't many of us left. We certainly have had some relief, but there are still a hell of a lot of Japs against us. Make sure you get

back and deliver that message. I've already sent it over the wireless, but your impressions will lend force to it."

The dejected officer dragged his filthy body out of the dug-out, while I went with him to show him round. He took his patrol away, down I.G.H. Spur into the steep jungle, for their long march back with the C.O.'s message.

The rest of the day, and the night, were quiet. On the morning of the 16th, the twelfth day of the siege, we were told to prepare our wounded for evacuation. The C.O. called in John Young and told him to make them ready. The doctor asked, "Shall I tell them they're going?"

The C.O. said, "No need to tell them. They're bound to guess from the preparations you make. They'll be lucky if they do go."

Throughout the day the wounded waited, with the stretcher-bearers ready to carry them down to the road for evacuation, but at three o'clock the message came through: there was to be no evacuation. The wounded were returned to their pits to suffer more pain, to withstand yet more shelling and, some of them, to die.

At 1600 hours we tuned in to the Japanese daily news broadcast to India. In three languages, English, Urdu and Tamil, they announced that Kohima had fallen. We reproduced in a message the bombastic language and fantastic claims the Japanese made with this announcement, and sent it round to all the men. Those of them that had a spark of humour left smiled as they read it; perhaps, after all, it was too near the truth to be funny, but it made mock of the propaganda broadcasts blaring out from the fort, day and night, "*Hindustan ke jawan, Japoni Fauj apke ird gird chakkar lagaya Lai. . .*" "Soldiers of India, the Japanese army has surrounded you. . . ."

That night was dismal and foggy; later came rain. The Japs battered their heads through the dank mist against the strong wall that was 'B' Company, now back near the tennis-court. They attacked with showers of grenades and armed with gelignite, and they attacked ferociously time and time again, but John Winstanley repelled them, rallying his platoons, bellowing unheard orders into the din, joining the fray wherever it was hottest.

Tom Hogg, the dour young Scot, and the gay and handsome

Victor King, John's two young subalterns, resisted them, slaughtering one after another of the enemy while urging on their men by moving from post to post. Sergeant Glyn Williams drove them back, using his left arm only, dragging round his half-paralysed body so that his men could see or hear him and draw strength from his courage. Corporal Richards held them off, tough, wiry, intelligent, giving orders to move his men to the right place whenever there was danger of a break-through. All John's Welshmen, and the few English still left to him, fought like demons, fought all through the night, until the Japs retired.

When they left, the exhausted men sank back, a few to doze, but most to prop open heavy eyelids while waiting for more.

Before dawn came another attack, this time against the men on F.S.D. Ridge. The onset came near to success, bringing the Japs within a few yards of the top of the ridge. John Laverty thought that 'A' and 'C' Companies must have at least twenty-four hours' rest before facing another onslaught, and as their position on F.S.D. was so critical he ordered what was left of the mixed force from the Assam Regiment and Assam Rifles to relieve them.

The relief took almost the whole day, the small brown men creeping reluctantly down to the trenches, while the Englishmen dragged themselves out and up the spur to the south slope of Summer House Hill.

While the relief took place a small patrol led by the R.S.M. went down I.G.H. Spur. As John had hoped, they found it clear, though the hillside and the road below were piled high with enemy dead, a gigantic heap of rotten, stinking corpses. It was an immense relief to know that on one front at least there was no longer a threat. But the road to Jotsoma was not yet open for the Japs held firm on Picquet Hill and the ridges to the north.

By four o'clock on this afternoon of the 17th April, the thirteenth day of the siege, the men from Assam were in position on the south end of F.S.D. Ridge. There was no one in the fold of ground, one hundred yards long, between them and Kuki Picquet, but on Kuki Picquet were Donald's 'D' Company, now forty men strong. Behind them again, to the north, was another fold of ground between Kuki Picquet and Summer House Hill. This, too, was empty, but on the south slopes of

the hill were the remains of 'A' and 'C' Companies, in all some eighty men, with a few Rajput soldiers nearby.

On the north side of the hill was the dressing station, very large now and extending round to the east spur running down to the D.C.'s bungalow. By the tennis-court was John Winstanley's exhausted 'B' Company, while I.G.H. Spur was still held by a handful of Yeo's gunners. Thus was the area held when the Japs made their last desperate effort to take Kohima from the south.

Corporal Gilbert was to play some part in scotching this effort. He was on the forward slopes of Kuki Picquet, Jim Mathews, John Harman's old friend, being with him. Mathews's wounded hand was giving him great pain. An early infection had taken hold of his arm, the poison slowly spreading upward until the whole forearm was swollen and raw red. The same field-dressing he had first applied was loosely wound round the swelling; it was filthy with grime and blood and sweat. The wound stank.

Mathews was saying as he slowly cleaned his Bren with his left hand, "Pity the old man being wounded like that. Won't be the same without 'im." Donald Easten, their company commander, had been hit in the fighting of the night before and they had carried him back to join Bobby in the dressing station.

Gilbert answered, "Yes, he was a good chap, that one, but we have a good one in his place. Fred Collett knows his onions. Different type of course, but just as dependable."

"It won't matter a damn who we 'ave if someone don't come bloody quick to give us a hand-out. Meself, I'm all in. The other blokes are getting the same way too."

Gilbert said, "Don't worry, Jim, they're on the way."

The two men had been looking to the west all day, watching the jungle-clad ridges through the trees over their right shoulders, watching the progress of the fighting. They saw the smoke of shells and bombs falling on Punjab Ridge, they saw the battle start up and die down on Terraced Hill, and on the ridge opposite to the north of the road. They saw the rest of Brigade, the Rajputs and the Punjabis, battling towards them, all too slowly, but now in view and making progress. Many others in the unit saw the fighting too, and took on fresh hope.

We in the command post took turns to watch from Summer House Hill, noting progress, and we passed the news round to

the men in two-hourly bulletins. We stated facts only, no conjecture; there had been enough conjecture in the past four days. Reaction to the news was not violent; there was no overflow of joyful emotion, only a faint stirring of hope in weary breasts, a smile here, a grin there, as the message passed round. The men now had an aim, a rough limit on the time in which they could draw on their last reserves of courage and resolution. The limit was not firmly fixed; maybe their ordeal would end in one, two, or three days, but there was no longer an eternity between them and relief.

Gilbert stood up in his trench as the daylight faded, looking through the trees and down on the ridges where the fighting was taking place. There was not much to see now—an occasional puff of smoke, a little movement on the road. He said, "They seem to have bogged down for the night, but they should be with us tomorrow. They're up to the forty-fourth milestone with a few tanks moving on the road. These little bastards have no answer to tanks. Trouble is, you can't use many in this sort of country."

Jim said, "Well, I 'opes they get a move on," and relapsed into silence. His arm was painin' him.

Soon after dark they saw the artillery concentration fall on F.S.D. Ridge in front. It was heavy, shells and bombs mixed, and they could hear also the crack and high-pitched whine of the solid shot fired by the quick-firing anti-tank guns. The din was terrific. Gilbert, putting his mouth to Mathews's ear, shouted, "I don't like this a bit. Those Assam chaps won't stand much of it."

"Poor sods," said Mathews, "they've 'ad an 'ell of a bashing. Started at the Chindwin, it did, all the way back 'ere and then no easy."

"I watched them this morning, they didn't want to go down there. You could tell by the look in their eyes, looking back over their shoulders."

"No more would I. Poor sods!"

Gilbert yelled, "I'll go and tell the boys."

He eased out of the trench and crawled to the other four men, all who were left of his section, bellowing at each one, "If those blokes in front start running back, just you stay put. There's no need for us to clear out." Then he scrambled back into his own trench.

Corporal Gilbert was right about the men out in front. To most men there comes a time in battle when, through fatigue and nervous strain, their minds and bodies can stand no more. There is a certain cure for this malaise, timely appraisal by their leaders and prompt action to remove them from the battle zone. The cure is at once effective, and, in a few days, such men are ready again for action. In Kohima there was no escape from the battle zone; leaders might diagnose, but could not treat the complaint.

A few among those forward on F.S.D. Ridge had already reached this point of no return when they went down to relieve Tommy's men that morning. The bombardment proved too much for them. As is the way with men who are trained to function collectively, only one man has to break and the rest, who are also in the same desperate straits, break too. The feeling spreads, and only superhuman leadership will hold the men steady. That is why, when the shells had been falling for some thirty minutes, Gilbert and Jim Mathews saw men running pell-mell up the hill towards them, shouting in a language that neither understood, but in tones they understood well, the tones of panic.

Panic, at once infectious, took hold, so that one or two of Gilbert's men joined the mob and started to run. Fortunately he saw them in time, as his section was closely concentrated, and he shouted at them to stay. He leapt at one who hesitated, throwing him back into his trench, so his section stayed firm, but some other men in 'D' Company succumbed to the panic and ran.

The Japs, following close behind, met those who stayed, running into a cross-hail of murderous fire. They stopped, to throw out showers of grenades, while firing phosphorus bombs at the huts on top of Kuki Picquet to set them alight. They then swept into the attack again, screaming, as usual, to bolster their morale, but those men of 'D' Company who held firm would not allow them through.

While the battle raged C.S.M. Haines could be seen in the unholy light of the flickering flames, inspiring his men. His methods were simple and direct. He told Hills to lead him to where he felt the battle to be fiercest, and there he stood, bellowing at the men that it would be more than their life was worth to leave their posts. His language, too, was direct. When

the battle died down in that quarter, he told Hills to lead him off elsewhere, and the two men stumbled through the firelight, Hills leading, the sergeant-major tapping the ground with his stick.

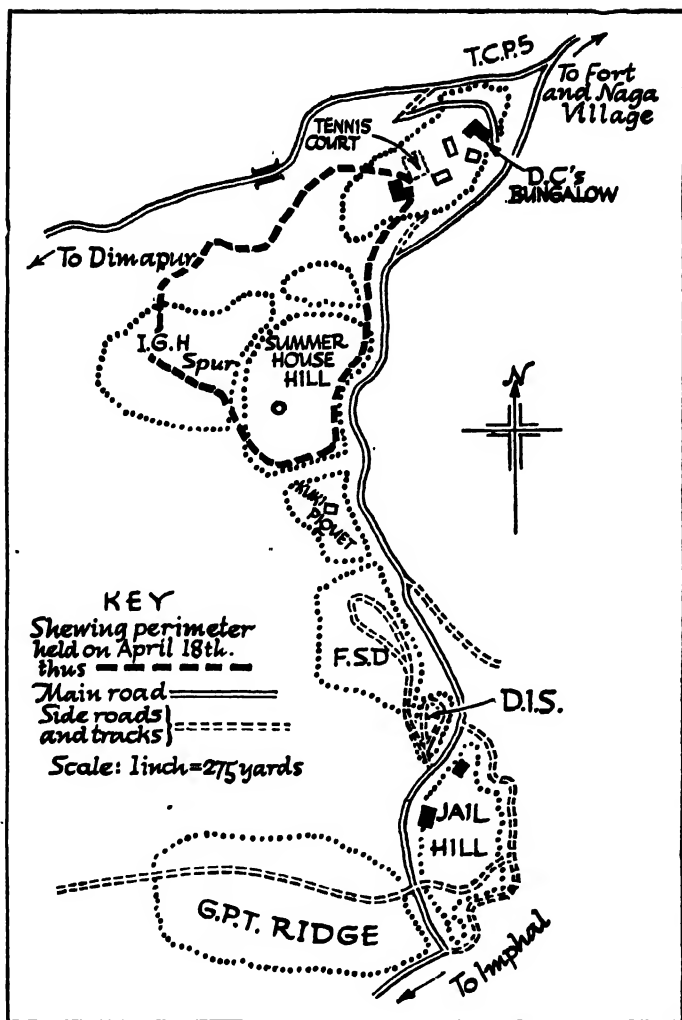
They moved from front to front, exhorting and threatening, until near midnight a burst of machine-gun fire caught the sergeant-major full in the face. He was killed instantly, his dead body falling to the ground, dragging Hills down on top. The young lance-corporal felt frantically for the heart and knew as soon as he found it that his sergeant-major was dead. He rolled off the body and lay beside it, while great sobs shook his puny frame. He was too tired to hold in any longer his pent-up emotions; he was too tired to move. The Japs could do what they liked; they could take over the whole bloody place; what was it to him? He had done his duty and could fight no more.

Meanwhile, Fred Collett was calmly directing the battle, moving round his company area, giving orders for a section to go here or a section there, as one position or another was threatened. There was nothing of panic in this stolid Mancunian. What terror had gripped the minds of the men who earlier had bolted from the ridge, what fear had touched the hearts of his own men, had no meaning for Fred. He was icy calm, but manoeuvre as he would in the restricted space, he could not prevent the multitude of enemies breaking through here and there. Shortly before dawn he realized that his position would be untenable in daylight.

He spoke to John Laverty, on the wireless, and the C.O. told him to withdraw to the south slopes of Summer House Hill at first light. The withdrawal was carried out quickly on Fred's orders, the men running back in groups, covered by fire from other groups, to the new positions. No sooner was it completed than fire was opened from the top of Kuki Picquet, from the very trenches and dug-outs they had occupied only a few minutes before.

The situation was critical. The Japs had only to drive forward one more wedge across to the narrow valley on to Summer House Hill and Kohima must fall. There was no better place from which to launch this attack than the top of Kuki Picquet, commanding as it did all the south slopes of Summer House Hill.

Fred had hoped that the Japs would be held off from the



top of the hill by cross-fire from Tommy's and Tom Coath's men, but so quickly had the Japs followed up that the fire could not at once be brought down for fear of hitting his own men.

Until the far distant guns could be brought to bear there was only one way of holding off the menace now building up

on Kuki Picquet: by mortar fire. The news of the feature's capture quickly spread to Sergeant King who realized at once the important part he could play in reducing the risk. His mortars, however, were not well placed to fire at the target—he would have to move them once again, while the ammunition, though fairly plentiful after the last two airdrops, was dumped in the wrong places.

He went down to the command post, not far away, to ask his C.O.'s permission to move the mortars and to beg for labour to shift the heavy bombs. We noticed, when he came in, that half his jaw was hanging away so that he could talk, only half intelligibly, out of the side of his mouth. His right shoulder was hunched forward with the shot-away portion of his jaw resting on it. While he spoke he kept spitting out gouts of blood on to the floor of the dug-out.

His C.O. ordered him off to the dressing station, but he would make no move until he had received his instructions, when he stumbled out, accompanied by Douglas and with the blood now dribbling freely down his neck and over his chest, to flay his mortar teams into further activity. Not until the bombs were falling on to Kuki Picquet did he make his way over to the dressing station. As he threaded his way through the mess of stretchers and trenches and shattered bodies two shells landed nearby, throwing him to the ground, unconscious. Two medical orderlies picked him up and carried him to where John Young was waiting. The doctor, barely able to see through the haze of his own immense fatigue, started treating the wound.

For the time being, the threat from Kuki Picquet was staved off.

Relief

EVEN so, our position was hanging by a thread. The enemy were now within one hundred yards of the command post, within one hundred yards of the dressing station, now holding no fewer than six hundred casualties. One of these casualties, Bobby Shaw, realized how tense was the situation when, at dawn, a soldier jumped into his trench, his rifle clattering down on the wounded leg, adding for a brief moment to the intensity of pain. He shouted, "What's up?"

The soldier jabbered, "The Japs are coming. They're coming. They're only fifty yards away, down the 'ill there. We can't hold 'em. We've 'ad it."

Bobby asked, "Who do you belong to?"

"'D' Company, but it ain't no good, they've been driven back. Japs swarming all over the place. We've 'ad it."

"Where are the rest of your chaps?"

"Down the 'ill there. But they can't hold 'em off. 'Ad to pull back. There's no stopping now. There are 'undreds of them all over the place, fighting, killing—got me pal, they'll get me, too—get the lot of us—we got to clear. . . ."

Bobby ordered, "Don't be a fool. Get back to your company." The soldier trembled and argued, while Bobby cursed and threatened until at last he left the shelter of the piles of sugar and atta bags to shamle off down the hill.

Then the non-combatants came swarming into the dressing station, completely out of control. Bobby raised his head to see them milling round in large groups, none of them knowing where to go, all of them thinking their last moment had come. John Young and Peter Franklin were trying to produce some sort of order among them; were trying to shepherd them away from the wounded to some place where they could do no harm.

One or two of the garrison officers were also with them, trying to bring them under control, shouting orders in English and Urdu. For an hour the dressing station was a shambles of wailing wounded, struggling stretcher-bearers, stampeding fear-struck men in tattered uniforms; a hellish babel of terror and dismay. At last John Young reduced the chaos to some sort of order.

Meanwhile, into battalion headquarters came a ray of hope; a wireless message promising relief that morning, the promise supported by the sort of facts we wanted. The infantry, supported by tanks, were driving the enemy rapidly back along the road towards us. John Laverty sent me to watch their progress, telling me to let him know what was happening. Taking Heffernan and Boorman as messengers I climbed on to Yeo's platform on the top of Summer House Hill. I sent messages back with the two privates as the relieving force progressed up the road:

"Desultory fighting on Terraced Hill. We seem to be firm there. Groups of infantry moving up road from milestone fourty-four.

"Heavy artillery concentration coming on Picquet Hill and Bare Ridge. Looks like prelude to infantry attack.

"Tanks moving up road from milestone fourty-four taking over lead from infantry. Appear to be firing on Picquet Hill."

Then an hour later:

"Attack on Picquet Hill and Bare Ridge going in now. Can see infantry fighting on Bare Ridge.

"Infantry moving down Bare Ridge north to south. Artillery fire moved on to ridge north of road."

Forty-five minutes later:

"We now seem firm on Bare Ridge and Picquet Hill. Tanks moving slowly up road to foot of Picquet Hill."

Then later:

"Tanks held up milestone forty-five. Infantry fighting off knoll overlooking milestone.

"Little progress at milestone forty-five. Japs appear to have firm road-block. Why the hell don't they bring more fire to bear from top of Picquet Hill!"

An hour later:

"Milestone forty-five cleared. Advance moving up towards foot I, G.H. Spur.

"Tanks approaching foot I.G.H. Spur. Infantry in section groups following behind on road."

Heffernan, who took this message, brought one back. Yeo had contacted 2nd Division's 25-pounder guns, directing them against enemy artillery. This was good news for we now had a weapon capable of reducing the shelling and mortaring to which we had been constantly subjected. But I was too busy to study the implications, too busy watching the progress of the two troops of Stuart tanks moving up towards the foot of I.G.H. Spur. They seemed to be going too slowly, one tank moving at a time, covered by two others. They could not deploy off the road because the slopes were too steep and the forests too thick.

Some time later I sent my last message:

"Tanks and infantry now cleared road to foot of I.G.H. Spur. Large convoy ambulances, three-tonners, carriers, moving up from Lancaster Gate. Should reach us in half an hour." I looked at my watch. The time was exactly 1300 hours on the 18th day of April, 1944, the fourteenth day of the siege.

Meanwhile there was frantic preparation for the arrival of the convoy. John Young, his one remaining doctor, the stretcher-bearers and those of the non-combatants who could be persuaded to work, were preparing the wounded for the long journey back to Dimapur. The walking cases were collected in groups and leaders nominated to take them down the road. Some of the stretcher cases were carried down I.G.H. Spur, one at a time, the sweating bearers carting their loads from cover to cover because the snipers were still busy, concentrating on the spur, determined to let as few men escape as they could. John Young was using up his last ounce of energy to help these men away, while driving on the others to similar exertions.

At 1330 hours I looked back at the road through my binoculars. The convoy was now quite close, and I could see in the leading jeep Bryn Williams and Jack Breadon, the quartermaster, bringing the precious vehicles to us.

Stopping the convoy behind Picquet Hill they dashed up the road to reconnoitre. Peter Franklin met them at the foot of the spur and showed them how to bring six vehicles at a time into the re-entrant beneath the ridge, where they would be under cover from Jap snipers and protected from the guns on J.N.A. Hill and G.P.T. Ridge. Bryn Williams took the jeep back and brought forward the first six vehicles, while I went

down to watch the evacuation. Walking up the spur I met the infantrymen of the 1/1 Punjabis, two companies strong, led by their commanding officer, 'Grim' Grimshaw. He said, "Your chaps are in a terrible state, but what you have done is already an epic throughout the army. Cracking good show." I sent Heffernan to guide him to the command post.

I did not witness the meeting between 'Grim' and John Laverty, but I could well imagine the immense relief as the load of responsibility slipped from John's shoulders. I learnt afterwards that the meeting was brief, because there was still much fighting to be done. They agreed to put one of the two companies of the Punjabis down by the D.C.'s bungalow, thus relieving John Winstanley's exhausted men, while the other company went to the south-west corner of Summer House Hill to reinforce our positions there. John Winstanley moved his men on to I.G.H. Spur and was joined there by the remains of 'D' Company, and by the men of the Assam Regiment. The arrival of these fine Indian soldiers improved the situation of the garrison, but it was not yet satisfactory, because we had no room properly to deploy. We would have to fight for room.

The first to leave were the walking wounded, limping down the road in tidy groups, each with a leader. The leaders were nominated from whoever happened to be there, so that some of the groups of Indian wounded were led by our privates while some of our men were led by Indian officers and N.C.O.'s. As they hobbled away the enemy fired on them from the Fort and J.N.A. Hill with automatics. Some of the men fell off the road as they were wounded again, but only the few stretcher-bearers stopped to examine the bodies. Some of these were left lying, now dead, others were carried on, among them a young soldier with both legs hanging limp, whom a resourceful orderly loaded into a wheelbarrow found lying by the roadside.

Then before we could stop them the non-combatants fled, headed by the 'man in the hole'. He must have moved from his own safe place on Kuki Picquet when the Japs took it over, back to another hole where he spent the last night. He was alive and safe, and in a hurry to go. I wondered what story he would tell his friends and his family when at last he reached safety; I prayed that he would never again be given charge of soldiers. As soon as he was on the road he broke into a double, and the men behind him started running, until the fever to escape

spread through all of them, so that soon they were rushing down the highway, a mad, disorderly mob. The enemy fired on them with their guns, killing many, but only the fallen stopped. At last I saw them disappear round the corner by the forty-fourth milestone, and glad we all were to see them go.

Meanwhile, the stretcher cases were being loaded on to the first six ambulances, a long job, because the bodies had to be carefully handled, while the snipers were still firing on I.G.H. Spur.

Bobby Shaw was one of the first to come down, his ashen face showing that he had suffered as much pain as his body could stand, and more. John Young told me that if he was not operated on that day he would probably die. Bobby was taken by the ambulance to the hospital in Dimapur where he waited for six hours without attention, because the hospital was crowded. At last he went himself to the surgeon and begged him to operate. The surgeon was a brain specialist from Harley Street who had been operating almost without rest for two weeks, but he agreed to deal with Bobby's leg. In the middle of the operation he passed out from exhaustion. The orderlies spent thirty minutes in bringing him round, when he carried on with his gruesome task. After that Bobby spent one year in hospital, and will spend the rest of his life with one leg shorter than the other.

Sergeant King followed closely, his shattered jaw held in place by a filthy bandage, his forehead puckered with pain, a dull glaze over eyes staring out through the bandage. I never saw Sergeant King again; I never knew whether a surgeon's skill ever restored to normal the sight of his face. I only know that when I had last seen it, while he was standing upright and alert receiving orders from his leader, a hole gaped where once had been a firm jaw.

Donald Easten was there, and Peter Doresa, both lucky, for they recovered in time to join us later and fight again. The subalterns, Smith, Inglis, Plythian and others, all of them in differing states of disrepair, all of them carrying their anguish with them, uncomplaining. There was a private with his arm shot away and a lump of dirty rags where his shoulder should have been; there was Sergeant Glyn Williams, who had been forced to leave by John Winstanley, because his right side was now paralysed right down to the foot.

Throughout the afternoon these, and many others, passed down the spur and into the waiting ambulances or three-ton lorries, while the enemy sniped or fired with their guns, both at the men moving up and down the spur, at the ambulances marked with the red cross, or at the three-ton lorries. It was a procession of torment, but all were at last moving towards comfort and proper treatment.

Some we saw again, others died of their wounds. One of these was 'Tops' Topham, our signals officer, among the last to leave. They were loading him into a three-ton lorry when a mortar bomb fell into the road, blasting great lumps of lead into his injured body. Two days later he died. No more letters would pass between 'Tops' and his fair young wife.

By evening the wounded and the non-combatants were all away, and we that were left turned our thoughts again to the battle. The atmosphere was happier in the command post that night, though we were all under strain, trying to fight off the lethargy which followed the first reaction to relief. But 'Grim' was there, a reminder that his magnificent soldiers were helping us out on the perimeter.

There was little fighting until four-thirty in the morning, when the Japs put in an attack on 'A' Company, driving them back to within forty yards of the command post. At the same time, 'D' Company of the Punjabis took their first attack down at the D.C.'s bungalow. They held it off.

On the next day we started the fight for more room to deploy by attacking Kuki Picquet. The attack failed and we did not press it home because we still felt that we had too few reserves within the garrison to use up troops in attack. Only Yeo drew comfort from this action. During the artillery bombardment which preceded it, he brought into action one of those guns which he had first brought in with him, and which had since been immobilized on Summer House Hill. He fired over open sights at a range of seventy yards, using the ammunition dropped on us a few days before by mistake.

On this day, the fifteenth day of the siege, we heard fighting on Terraced Hill and wondered if the Japs had once again blocked the road to Dimapur, the only road up which reinforcements could come, or down which we could pass out of Kohima. We learnt later that the Japs had blocked it by occupying a ridge from which they could fire direct on to the road. Only an

astounding display of dash and courage by the Durham Light Infantry cleared it.

The following night brought fresh enemy attacks, two from the D.C.'s bungalow and one from Kuki Picquet. In the fighting Harry Smith and Tom Coath, so far uninjured, were both wounded.

Before the night was done we received cipher messages that the 1st Battalion, The Royal Berkshire Regiment would relieve us on the following day, the 20th April, the sixteenth day of the siege.

All of us from the command post, except John Laverty, were early that morning at the foot of I.G.H. Spur, watching the men of the Royal Berkshires come in. They looked fresh, these men, and eager for fray, and they took over with great efficiency, filing in orderly fashion into our posts, while our men crept out in small groups to collect behind I.G.H. Spur, ready to leave. There were sallies from the men of the Royal Berkshires aimed at our looks, our beards, our kit, but few of our men replied. They were too tired for humour, they just wanted to get out, back to a good meal and then sleep, sleep and more sleep.

Tommy Kenyon was the first to file out, his men behind him. A brushless cream gave him a clean-shaven chin, but his skin was shadowed with dirt, accentuating the gaunt look of his face. His bleary eyes were deep back in the sockets, specks of red-rimmed brown circled with dead black skin. Except for a few hefty countrymen, his men were in the same state, drooping figures, thin as crows, shambling forward on weak knees. John Steady, aptly named, the man who had organized by careful forethought and quick action the only cookhouse in the area, drew up the rear of this pathetic group. The group included the ragged remnants of 'C' Company.

Then came little Fred Collett, his narrow rickety frame supported on two sticks of legs. His chest was bare, and his ribs stood out like a grid, the skin stretched tightly over the bars. Walking strongly, he gave me a grin and an "'Ow do?" as he went by. There were very few men behind him, the rest of his company being wounded or dead, and these few had seen John Harman, one of the bravest of men, die in their midst.

The C.O. joined us as John Young filed by. The doctor was sleep-walking, his legs carrying him down the hill like an

automaton. Behind him were other automatons, all Indians, fine men who had slaved themselves to exhaustion for the wounded in their care. Some, stronger than the others, carried Tom Coath and Harry Smith; Tom severely wounded, so that he would never again play rugger for Sidcup; Harry Smith, the schoolmaster, whose wound would mend to allow him another year of fighting before he could teach again. The padre followed the men of the Field Ambulance, marching alone, and Douglas called him over for a few words. Before he walked on the padre's eyes met John's, just for a moment. The look that passed from man to man was one of deep respect, for though these two would never understand each other, perhaps would never be friends, at least they understood each other's virtues after their great ordeal. The priest, our spiritual guide, a supreme example of faith and courage, had reached heroic stature in our eyes, though he was now so slight and thin that a puff of wind would blow him over.

Came Yeo with his Indian gunners, Yeo, still calm, unaltered by his exertions. He looked about him coolly, thinking of where the enemy artillery might be, and their snipers. He was only one hundred yards away when the Jap guns opened up from the direction of G.P.T. Ridge on a stretch of the road lower down. Yeo stopped at the roadside, training his binoculars on the ridge, spotting the flashes. He scribbled a message on a pad, tore it off and handed it to an orderly, telling the man to take it back to the Gunner attached to the Royal Berkshires. Not until the orderly returned did he march off down the road. Soon afterwards the 25-pounders fired on G.P.T. Ridge and the enemy guns were silent.

Behind the gunners, led by 'Topper' Brown, still hatless, still wearing his roll-neck pullover, now the colour of mud, came the handful of men still left of the Assam Rifles and the Assam Regiment, and mixed with them a few Gurkhas. All were utterly exhausted; it was as much as they could do to drag their feet down the road to the forty-fourth milestone, where transport awaited us.

Young Wright followed, with his sappers. Though still active, he had somehow aged five years in the last two weeks. Following the outstanding example set by Colonel Lander, the veteran officer in his own corps of engineers, his skill and enthusiasm had solved many problems when the battle began,

and his enthusiasm lasted right to the end. He had been an inspiration to us all, officers and soldiers alike. Marching with his sappers were a few more Indian gunners, men who had fought bravely in their strange role as infantry.

Came John Winstanley, tall and lanky, with his short, stocky Welshmen shuffling behind him. I always thought he was old for his years, but he looked even older now, with a touch of grey at the temples, walking in a giant stoop, like a hungry vulture. Victor King, his subaltern, strode forth jauntily as though walking out for a week-end's leave, joking with one of the sergeants. He was rather enjoying the war.

Peter Franklin came last, with a few men of Support Company. He was still fat and rubicund, the red glow of his complexion shining through his beard, and was smiling broadly, his little eyes twinkling through the matted hair. As he passed by, he collected Douglas, whose piratical red bush was voted the best in the battalion, and they went off together.

Then there was only John Laverly and Heffernan and myself. The C.O. was so thin, his skin so white, as to be transparent. His shoulders drooped with fatigue; his forehead creased with the anxieties he had suffered and with the immense responsibility; deep lines ran down his face from the corners of his eyes and mouth, lines which his neat imperial failed to hide. He had once been described to me as a bloody-minded Irishman; perhaps the Japs, if they knew of him, might give him such a name, for he had refused to admit defeat when no one else thought he could avoid it. He had come through a supreme test of leadership, and brought his men through with him, though all seemed lost.

But I liked better the name the men gave him: 'Texan Dan'. He looked something like a cowboy, with his broad-brimmed Gurkha hat straight on his small head, his uniform hanging untidily from his skinny body, his face both kind and sad, as cowboys' faces are.

He pointed upward and we climbed slowly, for the last time, to the top of Summer House Hill. The scene from here was one of dereliction, destruction and death. All round the hill were little mounds of earth, in small groups, each with a crude wooden cross driven into the loose soil. The valley towards Kuki Pioquet was strewn with parachutes, red, green, blue, white, some lying deflated on the ground, others canopied

on the jagged trees. Scattered among the parachutes were broken boxes, empty panniers, packaging of all sorts, cardboard, paper, sacking.

Beyond Kuki Picquet, still occupied on its further slopes by the enemy, a forest of trees, tops shorn off by shell fire, pointed barbed fingers to the sky. Among them we could see the shattered bashas and huts of the F.S.D. and the D.I.S., their tin roofs lying at all angles, some propped up against the burnt-out shells of the buildings, others in heaps where the blast had set them down. The brick walls of the bakery still stood, roofless and empty. There was a three-ton truck standing near the bakery, its torn canopy hanging in shreds from the burnt-out hulk.

Down the ridge to the D.C.'s bungalow was the same scene of rubble and wreckage, with odd parachutes, dropped off the D.Z., showing here and there, bright patches of colour among the drab green. The ground was stripped bare of its covering of rhododendron bushes and scrub so that the roofs over bunkers and trenches showed as brown mounds pushing up from level ground.

A few soldiers of the Royal Berkshires moved about among the desolation; the cries of men wounded that day came to us from the ruins of the dressing station; the all-pervading stench of death lay over the scene.

"Let's go," said John Laverty, and we made our way down the road.

THE END

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